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University Libraries Website Study Spring 2023

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University Libraries Website Study Spring 2023

Investigators: N. Floersch and J. Mayer, IRB Protocol # 2303048410

Introduction and Context

The University Libraries (UL) website is a gateway to our services and our many online resources. It is a highly used website: during each of the last two semesters, Fall 2022 and Spring 2023, it had approximately 100,000 views by more than 20,000 users. The last time we conducted a website user experience (UX) study was in 2017-18. There are current accessibility issues with the UL website, including the issue that some of the tab pull down menus are so long that they are not visible to some users on a laptop or mobile screen.

A key theme of UNC's Rowing not Drifting plan is the concept of students first. One of the objectives in the UL Strategic Plan is to review and update the usability of the UL website and research guides. Both of these factors were additional catalysts for this research project.

The purpose of our research project was to understand how University of Northern Colorado (UNC) students use our website. It informed us how we can improve website navigation and accessibility for our students to better support their success. Although planning for a university-wide website redesign is underway (ETA fall 2024 launch), improvements can be made now with minimal time and effort that will enhance the University Libraries website and improve its usability in the semesters leading up to the redesign. Our hope is that these changes result in a website that is easier for UNC students to use. Our overarching research question was:

How do UNC students use the University Libraries (UL) website to determine how to get research assistance?

In S. Krug's *Don't Make Me Think: A Common Sense Approach to Web Usability*, 2nd edition, p. 166 the author suggests the following points to keep in mind when designing websites and keeping the user's best interests at the forefront.

- Know the main things that people want to do on your site and make them obvious and easy
- Tell me what I want to know
- Save me steps wherever you can
- Put effort into it
- Know what questions I'm likely to have, and answer them
- Provide me with creature comforts like printer-friendly pages
- Make it easy to recover from errors
- These points align with suggestions made by UNC's Marketing and Web Communications departments in a series of webinars held during summer 2023. These suggestions include:
- Reducing duplication of pages and information, to make current information easy to find
- Making both web pages and downloadable documents accessible, which benefits all users (e.g., correct use of headers)
- "Chunking" information into short sections and emphasizing important information so it stands out
- Making navigation simple and easy to follow

Project Recruitment and Incentives

The researchers received IRB approval and publicized our study to both onsite and extended campus students via email and UL social media. We offered individuals the chance to win 1 of 5 UNC Bookstore \$20 gift cards, randomly selected. UL swag was an additional incentive.

Study Participant Demographics

A total of 15 students participated in the study (14 undergraduates and one graduate student). Of the participants, 14 were on-campus students who participated in person, and one was an extended campus student who participated via Teams. Two students self-disclosed that they were UL employees.

The participants have been in higher education for varying lengths of time, with the largest number being 4^{th} -year students (n = 6). Three participants were 1^{st} -year students, two were 2^{nd} -year students, two were 3^{rd} -year students, one was a 5^{th} -year student, and one was a graduate student.

Participants' majors varied across UNC's colleges, with six majors in Health and Social Sciences, four in Natural and Health Sciences, two in Performing and Visual Arts, one in Education & Behavioral Sciences, and one in Business. The major of one participant is unknown.

Limitations

Because the activity took place in a public area of the library with considerable background noise, some participants' responses were inaudible, and in a few cases, not all questions were asked of a participant.

Part 1: Overarching Questions

Participants were asked the following overarching questions verbally, and their responses were recorded.

Have you used / do you use the Libraries website?			
Yes	13		
No	2		

What do you use the Libraries website for?			
Scholarly purposes 12			
Leisure	1		
Both	1		

What is confusing about the Libraries website?			
Nothing	5		
Specific comments	8		

- Difference between databases and journals
- ArchivesSpace and Digital UNC
- Combination of Michener and Skinner holdings
- Inability to find needed items
- Availability of full text (sometimes available, sometimes not)
- Unaware that there is more to the website past the search box
 - *Three students shared the same feedback that they were unaware there was more to the website than the top section at other points in the study

Part 2: Activities

Participants were asked to demonstrate how they would perform various activities using the UL website. We asked them to both talk through their process and navigate through the website simultaneously, as much as possible. Their verbal responses and website navigation were recorded for later analysis using Teams. The questions asked and participant responses are detailed below.

1. Show us how you would ask a question or get help

All participants could do this task and their methods varied.

Process to ask a question or get help using the website		
Research Help tab > Ask a Librarian	3	
Research Guides link at top of page	2	
Ask a Librarian link in right sidebar	2	
Response inaudible	2	
Research Help tab > Schedule a Research Consultation	1	
Research Help tab, next step unclear	1	
Live Chat link	1	
Call or email	1	
Email	1	
Summon	1	

2. Show us how you would schedule a meeting with a librarian

Almost all participants could do this task and their methods varied.

Process to schedule a meeting with a librarian using the website		
Research Help tab > Ask a Librarian > Schedule a Consultation	3	
Research Help tab > Ask a Librarian, did not specify next step	3	
Ask a Librarian link in right sidebar	2	
Ask a Librarian or Live Chat	1	
Ask a Librarian or email	1	
Email	1	
Participant mentioned past experience doing this but did not specify how	1	
Did not know how, suggested we flip the order of the tabs and search box so tabs come first	1	
Did not know how, stated it was hard to do	1	
Response inaudible	1	

3. Show us how you would request an item we do not own

Some participants were able to complete this task; compared to the two previous prompts, a higher number were not.

Process to request an item we do not own using the website		
Did not know how	3	
Tried various options, then figured out Services tab > Borrow Materials from Other Libraries	2	
Response inaudible	2	
Catalog box at top, entered search term, went to Prospector	1	
Catalog box at top, could not proceed	1	
Prospector link at top, entered search term	1	
Ask a Librarian or Request a Purchase	1	
Email or call	1	
Prospector or Summon	1	
Participant did not realize this was possible, would ask a librarian	1	
Participant was not asked this question	1	

4. Show us how you would find a research guide

Many participants were able to complete this task.

Process to find a research guide using the website			
Research Guides link at top of page	4		
Research Guides (unclear if link at top of page, or tab)	3		
Research Help tab > Research Guides			
Response inaudible	2		
Participant was not asked this question	2		
Research Help tab > Ask a Librarian > Research Guides	1		
Participant "would search for them," did not specify how	1		

5. Show us how you would find a video tutorial

This task had the highest number of participants who were unable to complete it.

Process to find a video tutorial using the website	N
Did not know how	6
Research Help tab > Video Tutorials	5
Response inaudible	3
Participant was not asked this question	1

Notably, nearly half of the participants (n = 7) attempted or completed at least one task using the search box at the top of the screen, not a tab. Of these, three participants mentioned that they rarely scrolled down the home page. Two tasks had relatively high numbers of participants who could not complete them: finding video tutorials (n = 6) and requesting an item we do not own (n = 3).

Part 3: Tab Descriptions

Students were asked to describe what they thought would be under the main tab headings About Us, Services, and Research Help, as well as the drop-down tabs beneath each of the three main headings.

Notable themes and comments about tabs by topic by the current organization on the UL website follow. Of note, multiple (at least 3) participants mentioned they never scrolled past the Summon search box and did not know there was a whole other section of the home page.

About Us Subtabs

Strategic Plan: Students generally understood this as a planning document, although some were not sure what it meant. "What the library is doing to improve in the next 5-10 years like milestones they hope to achieve?" "It's your blueprint about what makes you, how you got to be the library, how you ended up being about to help students on campus."

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion: Most students had a general understanding of this concept, and it did not surprise them. "Statement that there is no discrimination, you are inclusive, and your goals around that." Some thought it would overlap with Strategic Plan. "I assume this would be with strategic plan." "Probably kind of the same thing as Strategic Plan." "Something everyone has now."

"I don't know why I would need that information as a student, but cool."

-Respondent commenting on University Libraries Scholars link

University Libraries Scholars: This got a high number of *I do not know* responses.

"I don't even know." "I have no idea." "People who have received a grant or they've published, and their work is in the library?"

Collections: Several students were confused by what this meant. Several students thought it related to special collections, a few thought in terms of different formats. "Don't know, that is a big topic."

"The different categories of books in the library (e.g., education, nursing)." "Old artifacts, maybe? Like the bear heads." "Different collections, like vintage VHS tapes? Or like we have a collection of work by this author who is an alum of UNC. Or books on mountaineering. I don't know. Or we have this weird book made of human skin." "Stuff you have like articles and maps and movies." One student suggested, "I almost feel like that should go in a different tab."

Plans, Policies, Reports: Students expressed some uncertainty about this category, and (like Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion) some thought it overlapped with Strategic Plan. "Plans, Policies, and Reports makes me question Strategic Plan." "What I thought Strategic Plan would be and Awards the library has won?" "I keep saying mission statement, but not like that. Is it for people who need to make reports, or are they your reports? Like I found a book that is torn."

History and Information: Ambivalence around this category. "Just what it says."

Give to the Libraries: Generally understood, but not of interest. "People who make contributions? I don't know." "Donate, we need your money. And how to do it as a tax write-off." "I don't know if that means money or resources."

Suggestions: Well understood, but rarely used. This page and its link to the suggestion form (which forwards to the main UL email) are rarely used according to the Head of User & Delivery Services, and patrons can easily contact the library via email and other methods. However, the form allows patrons to make suggestions anonymously. Therefore, it could be retained but moved to a different location on the website.

Friends of the Libraries: Generally understood, some thought it meant other libraries, category not for students. "Older people who support the library through different community events and book sale like our library here in town." When you buy things at their bookstore it helps fund the libraries." "Probably other libraries in the district."

Services Subtabs

"The number of links under Services makes me want to skip over this. Like I don't even want to get into this, services, but will. It's a lot to dive through—menu diving."

—Respondent commenting on list of Services tabs

Check Out Equipment: Many students were not aware of this service or had a vague idea and were excited to learn more. "I don't know exactly what, but you check it out at the desk." "How to do it, I guess and not sure if you can do it online or must do it in person." "I don't know what kind of equipment you have, maybe a projector, a guitar...something that isn't print." Many students were unsure what items are available for checkout; another guessed whiteboards.

Library Instruction: Most students thought this was for them directly or did not know what it meant. A couple knew it was to set up a "field trip" to the library. "It might just be me, but I guess the wording

'Library Instruction' didn't make me associate a teacher, reserving space for a certain amount of time--I wouldn't have assumed that" and "I could see a professor already knowing that..." "Not sure if this is instructions on how to get around the library; ambiguous; would have to click on it." "This is what you can find, this is how we can help you"

For Patrons with Disabilities: Most knew what it meant, the feedback was this is important, and we should make it easier to find. "Don't have it in the middle, could be hard for visually impaired to find. Or bold it or use bright colors." "This would tie into the DEI tab I talked about earlier. Different resources depending on what disability a student or patron has." One respondent who is a UL student employee noted, "We get a lot of questions about it."

For Distance Off Campus Students: General understanding, do we still need this category? "Distance and Off campus are not the same." "For people who are online."

"Weird category—aren't we all students?"

—Respondent commenting on For Graduate Students link

For Graduate Students: Self-explanatory for most students.

For Faculty: Widely understood. "It's fair to have a category for faculty."

For Alumni: Understood. "People who graduated from here, call this UNC graduates."

For Community Borrowers: Understood. "Someone who doesn't have an affiliation with UNCO but wants to borrow materials, check out study rooms or equipment."

Scholarly Communication: This category got a lot of *I* do not know responses, with a couple who understood the planning part of the research process. "I don't even know what that means." "Like how to get your research published in a scholarly journal." "Maybe reaching out to a specialist?"

Affordable Materials Support: Most students thought this was for them directly, it is for faculty. "Assume how you rent textbooks from library." "Discounted or rentable course materials." "Support for people who can't afford their course materials." "I'm assuming showing the affordable materials you have, and if you can afford them."

Research Help main tab: "Instead of research help, I wish there was just an FAQ. Since when you are in a hurry, it gets a little paralyzing. There are lots of things to choose from."

Research Help Subtabs

Ask a Librarian: Most understood the purpose. "I think I would see live chat here, where you can see who your subject librarian is. And set up an appt that connects with their calendar online or in person."

Research Guides: Most had a hard time finding them but had an idea of what they are. "I feel like that should be somewhere else. Like in scheduling." "Online research guides on topics."

Librarian Directory: Some students still think of the old subject librarian model. "I think I could set up an appointment with them here. A directory of all the librarians, and their contact info, name, pronouns,

phone number." "I don't know the difference between ask a librarian and librarian directory, they seem the same."

"Curious to see how this is different from Ask a Librarian."

-- Respondent commenting on Schedule a Research Consultation link Schedule a Research Consultation: Selfexplanatory to most students. "When you need to meet with a librarian about your research so they can help you navigate everything." (Contradicts other feedback that it is hard to make an appointment.)

Copyright Help: General understanding. "If you are not sure you are allowed to use it in your paper or not." "Citations and stuff." "Get help with consultation in this area."

Video Tutorials: Previous feedback earlier in the study indicated that these are buried. By this time, the students were aware since we asked about it in the Part 2 of this study. "Shorter snippets on how to do something." "YouTube or some video showing you how to use different resources of the library."

Part 4: Card Sort Summary Observations

Participants were provided with cards pre-printed with the names of three top tabs on the website (About Us, Services, and Research Help), and the names of the 34 subtabs under these tabs. The cards were presented randomly or in alphabetical order to avoid suggesting a desired order to the participants. Participants also received a marker and blank cards so they could add new categories, and a paper printed with a trash can icon on which to place any tabs they thought should be deleted. They were given unlimited time and asked to sort the tabs and subtabs in the order that made the most sense to them. We photographed the completed card sorts for later review.

One participant did not have time to complete the card sort.

Participants put a great deal of time into their card sorts and were eager to explain why they organized the cards as they did. Unfortunately, no clear patterns emerged from the results. Few new tabs were suggested, and few existing tabs were consistently removed.

Part 5: Recommended Changes to UL Website

We recommend making changes during holiday break 2023, to avoid confusion for students while they are using the website during the fall 2023 semester. We recommend promoting any changes to the UL website to the campus community in both December 2023 and January 2024.

Areas not understood and/or not of interest to most student participants:

University Libraries Scholars, Collections, Give to the Libraries, Friends, Check Out Equipment (*not well understood but would probably be of interest if it were marketed better), Library Instruction, Scholarly Communication, Affordable Materials Support

Rename the main tabs and reorganize/streamline the subtab pull-down menus.

ABOUT US

- Strategic Plan: Remove since it is duplicated in plans, policies.
- Plans, Policies, and Reports:
 - Keep Strategic Plan
 - o Keep most policies, rename to Libraries Plans and Policies
 - Move Library Best Practices to SharePoint
 - More reports to SharePoint
 - Keep Mission & Framework
- UL Scholars: Move it elsewhere
- Collections: Remove most, move Skinner information to Libraries Fast Facts.
- History and Information: Move to Archives tab under UNC History tab, rework to a Libraries Fast
 Fact infographic to be refreshed annually. Gather input from Libraries Leadership Group on the
 most pertinent statistics to include and request the ASC specialist create the infographic for the
 UL website.
- Employment: Remove this link, UL HR specialist says students use Handshake and that is an easier and better process.
- Suggestions: Move elsewhere
- Friends of the UNC Libraries: Combine with Give to the Libraries and / or move elsewhere

SERVICES

- Library Instruction: Move under Faculty
- For Distance / Off-Campus Students: Remove, move "Need a book, CD, DVD or other item?" and "Return Items" to Borrow Materials from University Libraries"
- For Graduate Students: Remove
- Faculty
 - o Rename tab to Instructors or something similar, to cover all who teach
 - Move to here: Affordable Materials Support
 - o Rename Ordering Materials for Collections to Request a Purchase (it links to this form)
- Combine For Alumni and For Community Borrowers: only 176 current accounts, per the Head of User and Delivery Services.

RESEARCH HELP

- Perhaps a Getting Started Research Help tab and Advanced Research Help tab
- Make them more student focused
- Promote video tutorials

DIRECTORY/PEOPLE

• Include the Librarian Directory guide with the list under About Us (several participants recommended moving the Librarian Directory to the About Us tab

Other Recommendations:

MORE TAB: Employment, History of UL, Suggestions, Friends, Give to UNC, UL Scholars

Remove TATIL icon (done) Confirmed with Head of Teaching and Outreach

Remove fax number (done) Confirmed with Head of UDS and UL Administration

Refresh the horizontal background image to one from the UL or UNC photo collections. This image has not been refreshed in at least 3 years.

The blue box pictured below appears on several UL website pages. It was initially added during UNC's pandemic closure to provide COVID information, and has since been revised to include general information about the Libraries. It no longer seems necessary to have this box on the website: all of the resources in it are easily accessible from other, nearby areas of the website, so the box is redundant and is just another element that users must scroll past to reach the website content (especially on mobile devices). Additionally, most links in the box are rarely clicked. Therefore, we recommend removing it.



Directions & Addresses: add a photo of the building and a map of walking directions

UL Website Statistics from Marketing

As a result of this UX study, N. Floersch was able to obtain UL website statistics for the first time since 2016. The statistics, from Google Analytics GA 4, confirm that the website is a frequently used resource and helped inform the recommendations in this report.

UL Website Page Views				
	Fall 2022 (Aug 22-Dec 9)	Spring 2023 (Jan 9-May 5)	Summer 2023 (May 6-Aug 20)	
Total views (any page with libraries in URL)	101,956	97,923	45,409	
Home	84,606	78,999	31,760	
Hours	1,353	1,493	877	
About Us	145	177	191	
Services	131	162	171	
Research Help	711	598	478	
People and Departments	600	846	598	

	Top 10 Most Visited Pages by Semester			
	Fall 2022	Spring 2023	Summer 2023	
	(Aug 22-Dec 9)	(Jan 9-May 5)	(May 6-Aug 20)	
1	Home page	Home page	Home page	
2	Reserve Study Rooms	Reserve Study Rooms	Archives	
3	Hours	Hours	Hours	
4	Off-Campus Database Access	Off-Campus Database Access	Directory	
5	Archives	Archives	Digital UNC	
6	Research Help	Directory	Off-Campus Database Access	
7	Employment	Digital UNC	Research Help	
8	Directory	Research Help	Library Maps	
9	Digital UNC	Employment	Reserve Study Rooms	
10	Library Maps	Library Maps	Employment	

Recommendations for Right Side Menu Bar:

In addition to analytics, Google provides a Chrome extension that tracks clicks from one page to another within a website. We used this data to examine the right sidebar on the UL website.

UL Website Sidebar Link Clicks					
Fall 2022 (Aug 22 - Dec 9) Spring 2023 (Jan 9 - May 5) Summer		Summer 2023 (May 6 -	Aug 20)		
Rank	# Clicks	Rank	Rank # Clicks Rank		# Clicks
1. Reserve Rooms and	897	1. Reserve Rooms and	566	1. Digital UNC	183
Equipment		Equipment		2. Ask a Librarian	119
2. Ask a Librarian	329	2. Ask a Librarian /	234 ea	3. Reserve Rooms &	114
3. Digital UNC	229	Archives & Special		Equipment	
4. Archives & Special	162	Collections		4. Library Maps	74
Collections		3. Digital UNC	211	5. Archives & Special	72
5. Library Maps	110	4. Library Maps	117	Collections	
6. Give to the Libraries	10	5. Give to the Libraries	4	6. Give to the Libraries	8

^{*}Two sidebar links, Schedule Library Instruction and Request a Purchase, lead to external sites (Qualtrics forms), so Page Analytics by Google is unable to provide data on them

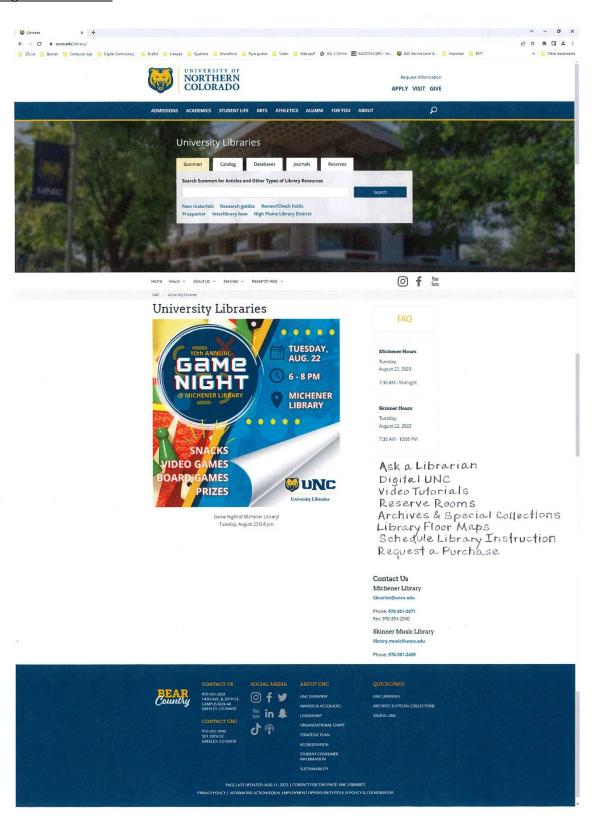
Based on this data and the findings from the UX study, we propose the following updates to the order and content of the sidebar links:

- Ask Us
- Digital UNC
- Video Tutorials
- Reserve Rooms
- Archives & Special Collections
- Library Floor Maps
- Schedule Library Instruction
- Request a Purchase

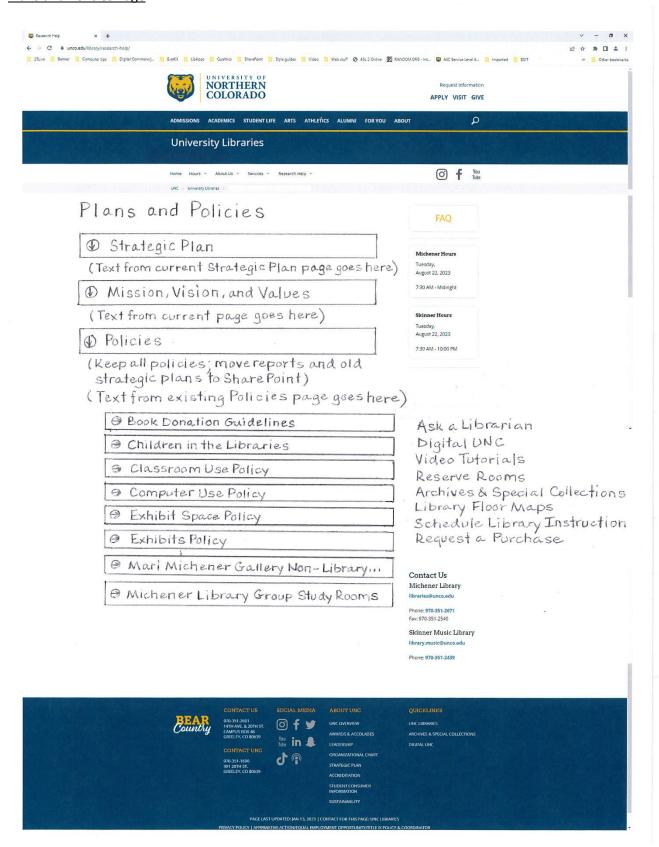
Appendix: Draft Web Page Updates

Recommended Tab Organization Libraries People/Info **Get Started** Advanced About Us More Materials and Services with Research Research **Spaces** Help Borrow People and Make a Materials Ask Us Scholarly Make a **Departments** from University Research Help Communication Suggestion Libraries For Patrons **Appointment** with Library Floor Request Items Disabilities **Libraries Fast** Copyright Maps from Other Video Help **Facts** Libraries **Tutorials** For Diversity, Research, Instructors Reserve Plans and Equity, and Scholarship, & **Study Rooms** Research **Policies** Inclusion Creative Works Guides Support For Give to the **Check Out** Community Scholarly Libraries Events, **Equipment** Borrowers Communication Exhibits, and **Tutorials** K-12 Disnlave Friends of the **Teaching UNC Libraries** Researcher Resources / **Directions &** Workshop Youth Books Addresses Series University Libraries **Scholars**

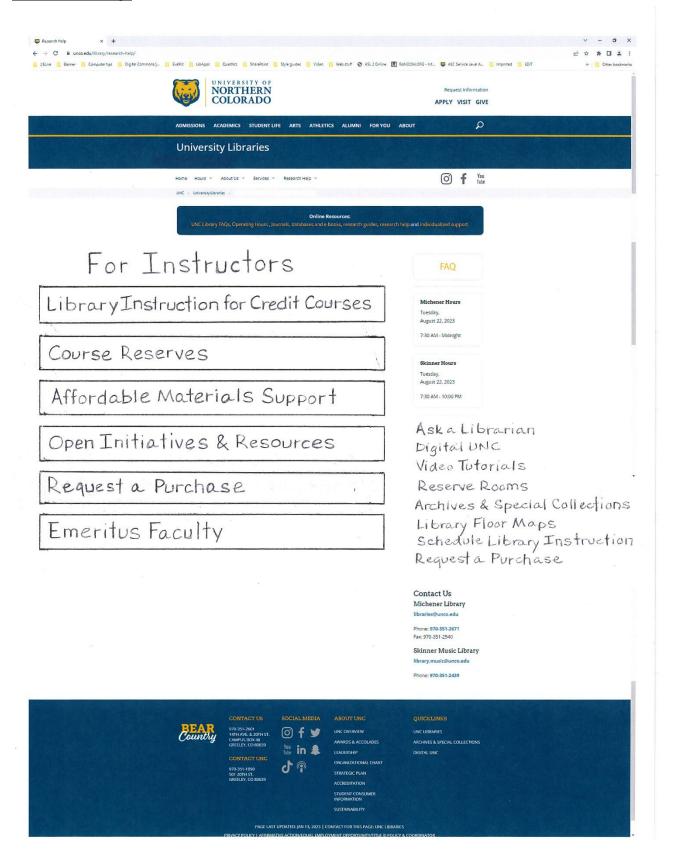
Right Sidebar Links



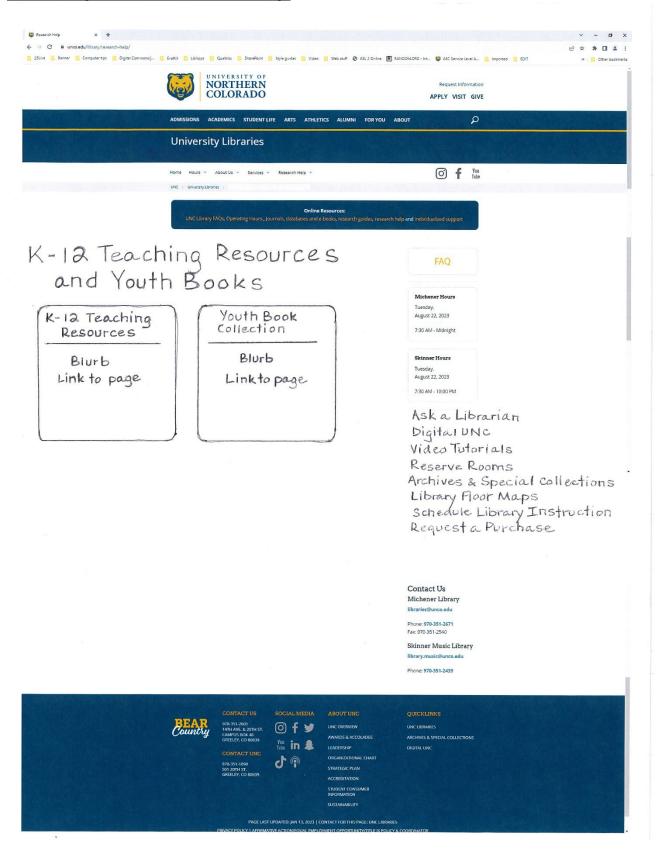
Plans and Policies Page



For Instructors Page



K-12 Teaching Resources and Youth Books Page



Advanced Research Help Page

