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The Evolution and Implementation of a Libraries Website Usability Study

Natasha Floersch, MA and Jen Mayer, MLIS

Study Goals

- Discover how students use our website
- Improve usability and aesthetics to support student success
- Make improvements before a UNC-wide web refresh scheduled for Summer 2025

Methodology

- Literature Review & IRB
- Utilized think aloud protocol, task scenarios, and closed card sorting
- Recruited via email, social media, Libraries Spring Carnival
- Drawing for \$20 bookstore gift cards as incentive

Each participant...

- Answered **demographic questions**
- Answered **general questions** about their use of the website
- Performed **research activities** using the website
- Described **what they thought they would find under each drop-down menu**
- Demonstrated **how they would do 5 activities**
- Created a **card sort**, organizing tab and sub tab headings

Purpose of Study

Overarching question: *How do UNC students use the UL website to determine how to get research assistance?*

- Address excessive amount of drop-down menus
- Investigate the impact of other recent changes on student help-seeking behaviors, such as the change to a functional service model from a subject liaison model
- Emphasis on student experience using our website

Findings and Resulting Actions

15 Participants:

- 14 undergraduate, 1 graduate
- 14 on-campus, 1 extended campus (participated via Teams)
- 6 4th-year students, other years varied
- 6 Humanities and Social Sciences majors, other majors varied

Findings:

- 3 students never scrolled past the top search box
- Drop-down menus were far too long (confirmed by students)
- Students had difficulty finding: Video Tutorials and Research Guides
- Students understood: How to Get Help, DEI, Strategic Plan, Suggestions (rarely used)
- Students did not understand: Affordable Course Materials Support, Check Out Equipment, Collections, Libraries Scholars, Library Instruction, Scholarly Communication
- Students were not interested in: Friends of the Libraries, Give to the Libraries, History & Information

Changes Implemented:

- Each top tab goes to a tile
- To prevent user confusion, we did not change any URLs
- Short explanatory phrases for links
- Items unimportant to students are less prominent
- Background image refresh (had not been changed in 3+ years)
- Employee directory page refresh (added photos, appointment scheduling links)

Stakeholder Input

Before making changes:

- Engaged with our stakeholders (Libraries Leadership Group)
- Balanced their concerns with the findings from students
- Integrated various opinions
 - This caused the work to take longer than expected
 - E.g., “show, don’t tell”: developed wireframes to propose changes visually
- 2023 full report to Libraries stakeholders:



Value and Impact

- Made informed decisions from student perspectives
- Gained access to Google Analytics statistics
 - We re-ordered sidebar links with the most-clicked items first
- Study served as a bridge to the UNC-wide web refresh
 - Helped us prioritize what to focus on in the future
- Prompted discussion about other needed changes