

Learning from Users to Create Intuitive Resources: Not Seeing the Forest for the Trees

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ABSTRACT

This poster will illustrate the design and results of a project conducted by a three-person team at the University of Florida's Health Science Center Library (HSL) in the fall semester 2008. Based on interactions with HSL users through direct consultations and data collected from a variety of surveys and the primary literature, it has become clear that many users are unaware of the extent of the resources available to them through the library. Furthermore, the data suggests there are barriers to discovery and that libraries often fail to make resources readily available to satisfy the information needs of their users. In the first part of the study the project team will monitor random groups of faculty, graduate students, professional students, and researchers as they navigate the library's website in order to answer a set of queries. The team will also use usability software to measure and analyze the human-computer interaction. The second part of the project will focus on applying the results of the user navigation study and usability data collected to improve the layout of the library's website.



RECOMMENDATIONS

- Environmental scans and usability studies should be ongoing library activities to keep the library's finger on the pulse of the patron base. This will assist in designing services and tools that meet the unique needs of users.
- A team should be created which consists of librarians, programmers and web designers to help develop tools that will help our clients make better use of the web and the resources the library has made available to users.
- The library should reevaluate its web presence to establish a more focused function that is aligned with the primary goals and objectives established by library leadership and its constituency.
- A redesign of library instruction is needed to provide classes, tutorials, and educational materials that better meet the unique needs of patrons.



Participant College	1 College of Education 3 College of Liberal Arts & Sciences 4 College of Medicine 1 College of Nursing
Participant Status	1 Undergraduate 6 Doctoral Degree (PhD) 2 Professional Degree (MD)
Previous Publishing	4 Published in Peer-reviewed Journal 5 No Publishing Experience
Formal Bibliographic Instruction	6 Received Formal Instruction 3 Received No Formal Instruction
Frequency in Using Web for Research	6 Daily 2 A Few Times Per Week 1 Does not Perform Research
Frequency in Using Web for Class	5 Daily 2 A Few Times Per Week 1 Weekly 1 Not Applicable
Frequency in Using HSL Website	1 Daily 3 Weekly 3 Every Couple Weeks 1 A Few Times Per Semester 1 A Few Times Per Year



PARTICIPANT QUOTES

"I think people will tolerate not being able to use things as well as they could, because they can still get the job done."

"I'm curious as to why it didn't occur to any of you to approach the library?"

"There's a stigma with the library... the stigma that it's search based, it's not help based."

"So now we're not talking about, necessarily about books, we're talking about the information contained in books and our ability to sort of pry it open like an onion to get to it, so really the goal of the library is no longer to collect information but to manage information..."

"I don't know if this is feasible but you'd get better response to these courses if you offered them in the department."

"But what you haven't sold me on is why should I use your homepage as opposed to Google or PubMed?"

"I will go to Wikipedia because it's easier to find the information even through it's not a credible source. And I don't want to do that, I want to use the resources because I know the University pays a lot of money so we can have these great resources. But it's not user friendly to me."

"I think fourth year (Medical School) would be interested in that (learning to search PubMed), because we're about to graduate and become doctors and we're like 'Oh no, we better know how to look stuff up. It's kind of the time when you realize this is pretty serious and we need to know how to do it.'"

"...I knew what I was looking for but I tried two or three sites and couldn't find a basic definition of a medical term and I thought well this is stupid I'm just going to Google!"

"A little 'did you know': Did you know your librarian can help you find stuff? That you don't have to search for hours in frustration?"



FINDINGS

The level of information literacy that we witnessed from the participants was a great deal lower than we had anticipated. This is particularly noteworthy as all the participants were either professional or graduate students and two of them had actually completed their graduate degrees. All are successful students, researchers and clinicians whose academic careers seemingly are not being affected by the low information literacy levels exhibited.

All participants anecdotally had encountered some problems in finding the information they needed. Yet not one of them thought about asking a librarian for help. In fact, during the keystroke recording activity the librarians were present and although the participants were having obvious problems no one asked any questions.

They always went to the resources they were most familiar with regardless of whether that resource was the most appropriate for answering the question on hand or not.

The level of competency stated during the focus sessions, particularly among the more experienced students, belied the level of competency witnessed during the key stroke taping sessions. The more experienced participants exhibited a greater level of difficulty when attempting to answer a broad or general question. They were all much more comfortable with the specific questions.

It was clear that none of them knew what the appropriate resource was to use for answering each question. And in fact, it was also clear that there was no understanding that different resources could and should be used to answer the different type of questions.

It was painfully clear that the libraries and the librarians, in particular, have not done a good job in explaining what services we provide and what we can do to help them with their daily work.