

**Report**  
**Phase 1 - Usability Tests on Other Academic Libraries Web Sites**

Spring 2005

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**Summary of Findings**

On peer institution library web sites, test participants were 100% successful at only one of the seven tasks: *finding books in the library catalog*. Tasks with noteworthy success or combined success/partial rates of at least 62.5% included *finding a database by name*, *finding an article in a journal or magazine*, and *renewing materials checked out*. Failure rates were significant for the following tasks: *finding a journal or magazine that the library owns*, *finding an article in a newspaper*, and *finding a research guide*.

Some consistent issues across the sites:

- Over- and misuse of the keyword search in the library catalog.
- Problems searching for newspapers.
- The link terminology "Get an article" on the UW site is good, but the page returned is informational and less useful.
- The link terminology "Services" is good, but does not match user expectations. For example, they often looked here for help guides as a library "service".
- Test participants wanted discipline-based research assistance.
- They had trouble distinguishing between journals and magazines.
- Participants often made assumptions based on their experience of our site.

On tested sites, the library catalog search functions were readily apparent on the homepage, making the catalog search easy to accomplish. Homepage links to the patron or library account for renewing books worked well. The University of Northern Iowa Library's homepage icons were clear and eye-catching. The text-heavy homepage of University of Rochester's library site seemed cluttered, but important elements were there, such as links to Articles and Subject Resources.

## OBJECTIVES

**The purpose** of testing other academic library web sites was two-fold:

- To evaluate what works and what doesn't on peer institution sites
- To gain experience in the testing process

## USERS

**User Profile:** Primary users of the web sites were undergraduates. Some were inexperienced library users, unfamiliar with library terms, processes and our site. They were, however, comfortable with the online environment (for example, using search boxes).

**User Priorities:** Users' primary goal was to find resources for their research assignments. Using information gathered from the user web site survey and the focus group we developed a list of four specific primary objectives from a user's perspective:

1. Find library materials
2. Find articles
3. Find help locating and using resources
4. Access and use the library patron record

## TESTING PROCESS

We tested the library web sites of peer institutions to find out what these other sites did well, what worked or what was easy to accomplish. Because we were generally testing the homepage navigation of these sites, we usually had test participants return to the homepage after each question. We employed the Talk Out Loud (TOL) protocol and used Camtasia to record results.

### Peer institutions:

- University of Oregon Libraries
- University of Washington Libraries
- University of Northern Iowa/Rod Library
- University of Rochester/River Campus Libraries

Individual tests can be viewed at the following URL: <http://www.library.wvu.edu/intranet/usability/camtasia/index.html#phase1>

**Metrics:** Tests were analyzed using the following criteria or metrics:

- S (Success): Follows the privileged path to the correct answer in a reasonable (minimal) amount of time.
- P (Partial success):
  - completes part but not all of a task
  - does not follow the privileged path but completes the task in a reasonable amount of time
  - struggles – takes excessive time, makes many false starts, eventually completes task but does not use privileged path
- F (Failure): unable to complete task at all or gives up

## Objectives, Related Tasks, Metrics & Findings

OBJECTIVES	TASKS	METRICS	FINDINGS
<b>1. Find library materials</b>			
Find an item [book] that the library owns.	Does the library own the book <i>Catcher in the Rye</i> ? (Q1)	User searches the library catalog by title, and can decipher catalog record to determine whether item is owned by library.	Success 100%
Find a journal or magazine that the library owns.	Does the library own <i>Sports Illustrated</i> ? Where is it located? (Q4)	User searches the library catalog for the journal, using the title or journal title search function. User interprets catalog record to determine location.	Success 24% Partial 29% Failure 47%
Find a database (abstract or index) by name using the alphabetical list OR the library catalog.	Your professor asked you to go to the library and use ProQuest. (Q3)	User goes to a list of databases and selects "ProQuest" from the alphabetical list OR user searches the catalog for the title "ProQuest" and correctly selects and links to the database.	Success 59% Partial 12% Failure 29%
<b>2. Find articles</b>			
Find an article on a particular topic in a type of source - journal or magazine	Your professor wants you to find an article in a journal or magazine on any topic in political science. Where would you go to find this? (Q7)	User chooses an interdisciplinary index (ProQuest) or a discipline-based index from a subject list.	Success 59% Partial 29% Failure 12%
Find an article on a particular topic in a type of source - newspaper.	How would you use the library web site to find a newspaper article? (Q2)	User chooses a newspaper index (ProQuest, Global NewsBank, etc.) from databases list.	Success 24% Partial 35% Failure 41%

<b>3. Find help locating and using resources</b>			
Research Guides	The library has created guides detailing how to do research in different subjects. Find the guide on history. (Q5)	User clicks on Research Help (or similar link), then selects any of the guides related to history.	Success 59% Failure 41%
<b>4. Access and use my library patron record</b>			
Renew materials checked out.	Where would you go to renew a book you have checked out? (Q6)	User finds library patron record link OR renew books link.	Success 82% Partial 6% Failure 12%

## Success Rate Case Studies

### Case Study 1:

University of Washington [1a]

	Task 1	Task 2	Task 3	Task 4	Task 5	Task 6	Task 7
User 1	S	F	S	F	F	F	P
User 2	S	S	S	F	S	P	S
User 3	S	S	S	F	F	S	P
User 4	S	P	S	P	S	S	S
User 5	S	S	S	F	F	S	S

Total attempts to perform the tasks = 35

Successful attempts = 21

Partially successful = 5

Failures = 9

Success Rate:  $(21 + (5 * 0.5)) / 35 = 67\%$

### Case Study 2:

University of Oregon [1b]

	Task 1	Task 2	Task 3	Task 4	Task 5	Task 6	Task 7
User 1	S	F	F	F	S	S	P
User 2	S	S	S	S	F	S	S
User 3	S	F	F	S	S	F	S
User 4	S	F	S	S	S	S	S

Total attempts to perform the tasks = 28

Successful attempts = 19

Partially successful = 1

Failures = 8

Success Rate:  $(19 + (1 * 0.5)) / 28 = 69\%$

### Case Study 3:

University of Northern Iowa, Rod Library site [1c]

	Task 1	Task 2	Task 3	Task 4	Task 5	Task 6	Task 7
User 1	S	P	F	P	S	S	S
User 2	S	P	F	P	S	S	S
User 3	S	P	F	F	S	S	P
User 4	S	P	S	P	F	S	S

Total attempts to perform the tasks = 28

Successful attempts = 15

Partially successful = 8

Failures = 5

Success Rate:  $(15 + (8 * 0.5)) / 28 = 68\%$

### Case Study 4:

University of Rochester, River Campus Libraries site [1d]

	Task 1	Task 2	Task 3	Task 4	Task 5	Task 6	Task 7
User 1	S	F	S	S	S	S	S
User 2	S	F	S	P	S	S	P
User 3	S	F	P	F	F	S	F
User 4	S	P	P	F	F	S	F

Total attempts to perform the tasks = 28

Successful attempts = 14

Partially successful = 5

Failures = 9

Success Rate:  $(14 + (5 * 0.5)) / 28 = 59\%$

\*For these sites, we gave each partial success half a point or 50%.

"In general, 50% credit works well if you have no compelling reasons to give different types of errors, especially high or low scores."  
(Nielsen, 2001)

"...most websites score less than 50%." (ibid)

From <http://www.useit.com/alertbox/20010218.html>