

Western Libraries User Survey - Spring Quarter 2005 Summary Report

Introduction

This report summarizes the results of a survey used to gather input about the Western Washington University library web site. The survey was offered as a link on the library home page from May 10th, 2005 through May 27th, 2005. The survey was also linked to from the campus portal, MyWestern, for approximately one week.

The purpose of the survey was to incorporate user feedback into the redesign of the Western Libraries web site. The survey, in addition to focus groups and usability testing, represents the initial steps taken by the library in its shift from a library-centric web site design to one that more closely follows the principles of user-centered design.

The survey was completed by 263 respondents. The questions were designed to solicit demographic information, use patterns, user behavior, overall satisfaction, preferred terminology, and to recruit potential participants for a future focus group.

There were 11 questions on the survey, two of which were completed only if the respondent wanted to offer further assistance. The majority of questions were open-ended intended to measure user satisfaction and also determine reasons for using the library web site.

Included below is a breakdown of each question, followed by a brief summary. The actual survey is included as appendix A.

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Summary of Findings – Quantitative Analysis

This section examines those questions that are easily quantified. Included here is analysis of questions 1, 2, 3, 7, and 10.

Question 1 – Your current status

(99% completion rate)

- 78% of total responses were from undergraduates
 - Freshmen – 8%; Sophomores – 12%; Juniors – 22%; Seniors – 36%
- 22% of total responses were from graduate students, faculty/staff, or community users
 - Graduate students – 14%; Faculty/Staff – 5%; Community Users – 3%
- 20% of total respondents volunteered to help
 - Highest volunteer rates in ascending order: Faculty/Staff; Graduate Students; Seniors; Freshmen
 - Additional demographic data was requested from volunteers. This included contact information and either major or department affiliation.

Question 2 – How often do you use the Western Libraries web site?

(98% respondents completed)

- 89% of respondents use the site regularly
 - Almost everyday – 14%; Several times each week – 34%; Several times each month – 41%
- 11% of respondents use the site less than once a month

Question 3 – How satisfied are you with the Western Libraries web site? (1-low, 5-high)

(99% respondents completed)

- Average score from all respondents – 3.5
- 75% of total respondents chose either 4 or 5 as their satisfaction level
 - 1 – 2%; 2 – 10%; 3 – 29%; 4 – 50%; 5 – 25%

Question 7 – If you were looking for articles from magazines, journals or newspapers, which of the following terms would be most helpful in guiding you to the right place?

(96% respondents completed)

- Find Articles – 46%
 - Search Databases – 25%
 - Online Databases – 33%
 - Periodical Indexes – 6%
 - Indexes to Articles and More – 6%
 - Other – 4%
- This question was meant to test whether or not the library's existing terminology for finding articles was adequate. Clearly, users preferred "Find Articles" over the existing "Search Databases" or any of the other choices.

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Summary of Findings – Qualitative Analysis

This section examines the questions that are more subjective, and therefore, more difficult to quantify. Attempts were made to identify common themes and broad similarities within the five open-ended questions on the survey. Included here is analysis of questions 4, 5, 6, 8, and 9.

Question 4 – What are the main reasons that you use the Western Libraries web site? (95% respondents completed)

- The responses were placed into general categories.
 - Respondents use the site to: Search Catalog – 59%; Find Journal Articles – 57%; Do General Research – 31%; Find Specific Databases – 22%; Accomplish Miscellaneous Tasks – 21%
 - Miscellaneous tasks included: Renew materials; Find ProQuest; Look for Help, etc.
 - It was interesting to notice that some commonly accepted library terms were barely used in this or other categories. Some of these included: library catalog; subject guides; index
- Notable Quotes
 - “I search the databases for online articles frequently. I love the Findit! option within the databases. The library is the first place I turn to conduct my research”
 - “To find research articles.”
 - “To find books and articles for research projects for WWU classes.”
 - “I use the website to find books in summit and here at the libraries, to check on the due dates of my books, to renew books, look up information on creating bibliographies and reference notes in papers.”

Question 5 – Is there anything that would make the Western Libraries web site easier to use? AND

Question 9 – What other general comments/observations do you have concerning the Western Libraries web site?

(75% respondents completed question 5 | 33% respondents completed question 9)

- The results from the two questions were combined and put into general categories. It was assumed that responses in these categories reflect problems that users had with the web site.
 - Users had problems with: Finding Articles – 27%; Overall Navigation – 18%; Using the Library Catalog – 14%; Miscellaneous – 14%; Overall Design – 13%; Finding Research Guides – 8%; MetaSearch/FindIt – 6%; Electronic Journals – 4%; Maps/Location Guides – 3%; Login/Authentication - <1%; Illiad - <1%
 - Miscellaneous included everything from “Get rid of Illumina” to comments on the general confusion and complexity. Several users were confused when they ended up at pages (presumably in e-journals) where they were required to put in passwords.

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- Notable Quotes – There were many quotes that referred to the difficulty of finding articles.
 - “I find article searching incredibly frustrating.”
 - “I guess I like Find Books and More or Find Articles and More used by some libraries rather than Library Catalog and Search Databases.”
 - “I am always confused when I try to use the database to search for journal articles.”
 - “Make it more straightforward, especially when it comes to databases. Every time I use that section I get really confused.”

Question 6 – What do you like most about the Western Libraries web site?

(77% respondents completed)

- The responses were analyzed in an attempt to identify reoccurring words and/or phrases used to describe what people liked about the site. The main purpose of this question was to gain further insight into the areas users thought were most important. Some general themes that appeared included:
 - Ease of use; Findit!; Accessing databases from home; Renewing online; Searching the catalog; Searching for articles; Simplicity
- Notable Quotes
 - “I appreciate being able to check when things are due, and renew materials online. That is very convenient because I don't have to bring things in to renew them.”
 - “It doesn't have a lot of extraneous information upon first entrance and is easily accessible from my home computer.”
 - “The Findit! feature in the online databases.”
 - “I like that it doesn't seem like the library is trying to sell itself to me (check out some of the government website - they almost seem commercial)”

Question 8 – Which of the following would you search for in the Library Catalog?

(98% respondents completed)

- Choices included: Books – 90%; Journal titles we subscribe to – 61%; Articles in journals – 64%; Electronic Journals – 48%; Videos – 47%; Other – 7%
 - There weren't too many surprises here, except for the fact that 64% of respondents use the library catalog to find articles in journals. This indicates a major gap between what users think they are searching and what is actually being searched. This misconception is often witnessed during reference interactions so it is not news to the library. However, the high percentage from the survey results is alarming, especially when considering that this number is higher than the “Journal titles we subscribe to” category.
 - Highlights from the “other” category included: reserve items; new materials; microform; music; government publications; and newspapers

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Conclusion

While satisfaction with the Western Libraries web site appears to be relatively high, it is clear that users are having problems finding articles and navigating the web site. Another major problem relates to users not understanding what they are searching. This is especially true in relationship to articles within the library catalog.

Knowing that users generally “feel good” about the web site is helpful when considering whether to do a major overhaul versus a more simplified redesign. The navigation issues, as well as the problems finding articles, can probably be addressed without wiping out the existing structure of the site. A more simplified approach to the redesign will help expedite the process and it will minimize stress on users who are constantly experiencing change on the web.

There are some immediate fixes that should improve the process of finding articles. One of these involves changing the terminology from “Search Databases” to “Find Articles.” Another possibility is making some of the library resources (e.g. research guides and help guides) that are currently buried in the site more obvious. Other improvements are yet to be discovered. One of the key reasons for conducting this survey was to figure out how people are using the library web site. This information would then be used to create meaningful usability tasks. Using the data from the survey to create better usability tests will help the library accomplish its goal of creating more of a user-centered design.

