



STUDYING STUDENTS TO ENHANCE LIBRARY SERVICES AT RUTGERS UNIVERSITY:

PRINCIPLES AND PRIORITIES FOR MOVING FROM RESEARCH TO REDESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE LIBRARIES WEBSITE

THE FINAL REPORT OF OUR ETHNOGRAPHIC RESEARCH PROJECT

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INTRODUCTION

We carried out this ethnographic research project to investigate the research behaviors of Rutgers University undergraduate students, graduate students, and faculty in an effort to discover how library and information resources are used, in particular the Rutgers University Libraries website. We intended that the research would highlight ways in which the website might be improved both to enhance the research experience for users and to attract new users.

This final report details the principles and priorities developed by the core team for guiding improvements to the Libraries website. Project methods and detailed results are contained in two reports available on the Libraries website at: <http://www.libraries.rutgers.edu/rul/staff/groups/ethnography/reports.shtml>. Also at the same location are coded comments from the surveys of graduate and undergraduate students and review reports with specific recommendations from relevant councils and committees on the coded comments contributed by survey respondents.

The study gathered a great deal of data. The various reports describe the "what" of improving our website. The design team will determine the "how."

PRIMARY FINDING

The Libraries website needs to be viewed quite differently by librarians and library staff than it has been to date. Instead of being a vehicle for library information, it must become a tool. Website users do not want to read and be instructed, except perhaps by choice. They desperately need and want the website to carry out actively what they need to have done. As Roy Tennent has written:

"You know you want it. Or you know someone who does. One search box and a button to search a variety of sources, with results collated for easy review. Go ahead, give in—after all, isn't it true that only librarians like to search? Everyone else likes to *find*."¹

Our results confirm this view.

¹ Digital Libraries- Cross-Database Search: One-Stop Shopping, by Roy Tennant. Library Journal, 10/15/01. Viewed February 3, 2010: <http://www.libraryjournal.com/article/CA170458.html>.

PRINCIPLES

These principles should guide current and future redesign and development of the Libraries website:

1. Flexibility. Users should be able to customize both their experience and where they receive information as individuals and as members of groups.
2. Integration. The Libraries website needs to integrate more tightly with such user tools as Sakai, the university website, myRutgers, departmental websites, continuous education, RUcore.
3. Information literacy. The Libraries website should express and be an integral part of information literacy learning at the university.
4. Simplicity. Less is definitely more. The Libraries website should be easy to get to and remember, with fewer clicks and explicit language.
5. Context. Website users should always know where they are and how they got there.
6. Self-sufficiency. People want to find and do for themselves. Tool development should focus on self-sufficiency.
7. Process. There needs to be an iterative and permanent process of redesign and development that incorporates version releases, constant rethinking of strategy, and constant feedback.

PRIORITIES

After reviewing all reports and comments, the Core Team has identified the following priorities for initial website redesign and development. They are listed by priority within broad categories. The categories themselves are not prioritized but are listed alphabetically.

Access
Single sign-on/login – Users desire one login for all services we offer. It should be integrated with the login for remote access. They report not being able to access resources remotely without paying.
E-Journal process
E-journal process – Our process for finding e-journals and articles in them is undeniably broken. Users need improved discovery, navigation, URL access, selection by discipline, and enhanced federated searching capabilities. They come to us needing a particular article or wanting articles on a particular topic, and we present them with lists of database and journal titles. They scroll over Searchlight and do not see that it might be the single search box they desire. Users search our databases or Google Scholar and cannot figure out how to link to our e-articles even when we offer them. Users experience requests for payment when accessing our resources remotely.
Help users identify databases to use for their research – The broad subject breakdowns of indexes and databases, advanced search subject choices within Searchlight, and the research guides are not doing the job. They need to be brought together and surfaced.

Navigation
Navigation – Users want to find rather than search and search rather than read instructions.
Surface high demand resources – We need to aggressively and continually identify our high demand resources and give them top real estate. Titles mentioned often are Academic Search Premier and JSTOR; one Web page in demand is our Hours and Directions. What are the others? How do we feature them?
Match user expectation in Web 2.0 in color layout, widgets, and services – This is not currently among our first priorities.
Search – Many users desire one Google-like search box. We need to improve our federated search function, extending it to more databases and to such other tools as our website, IRIS, RUcore, etc.
Personalization and context – point of need
Personalization features – Users want to manage their favorite resources.
Delivery of services to tools outside the Libraries context – Several users requested the availability of maps that would guide to a particular book in our stacks. Such maps could be on a cell phone as the user walks to the stacks. Other places to deliver our services include departmental websites, Sakai, myRutgers, etc.
Create different Web spaces for different user groups - Users come to us with different levels of expectation and skills as well as different needs dependent on discipline and status.
Help when needed – Users requested such helps as one-minute podcasts at point of need and very brief text when they stumble.
Research guides - Users don't want to bother librarians. We need to explore making on demand/online librarians more available and investigate how to incorporate provision of subject expertise in a discipline.
Simplifying
Change labels – While we constantly strive to minimize library jargon, our users want us to do better and give them an easier to use website.
Repave – We need to get rid of tripping spots, extra clicks, etc.
Top page
Service orientation on top page – The website should provide services supported by lower pages rather than lists of resources.
Front page delivery – The left hand menu is too cute, crowded, etc.

STRATEGIES

Suggested strategies for managing the web redesign and development are:

1. Unify redesign, development, and ongoing oversight of the website by integrating the responsibilities and functions of the Web Advisory Committee (WAC) and Web Services into one new group. Include representation from the IRIS Public Access Committee (IPAC). Recognize that the silos of website content, technology, and public catalog are a library construct and are not meaningful to users, who rightly integrate the services in their mind.

2. Work with other groups, as appropriate, such as the Digital Interface Group (DIG), for implementing changes to the e-journal process. Leverage existing expertise and service/resource management processes to add efficiency, integration, and different points of view and expertise to the redesign and development process.
3. Recognize that website redesign and development is an ongoing process that needs to reflect changing user needs and changing technologies and not a discrete and massive project occurring every 3-5 years. Develop a version schedule for incremental, ongoing changes. Schedule at least two website versions annually.
4. Identify and prioritize website functionalities into coherent and coordinated website version releases.
5. Recognize dependencies/interrelationship to other developments, such as the selection of a new open source public access catalog for VALE that would be a strong candidate for the new public catalog interface for RUL. Other dependencies include integration with services offered via OIT (Sakai, myRutgers, etc.), changes to RUcore, etc.

OTHER ISSUES

Several remaining issues point to possible future activities:

1. At the request of the Core Team, Jeanne Boyle, the remaining principal investigator for this project, filed a successful request for continuing review with the Institutional Research Board to give us flexibility in following up with users for clarification, feedback, etc. The Core Team remains ready to oversee any additional data gathering required. We encourage all library faculty and staff to consult existing ethnographic data or use Google Analytics or RUL website statistics before beginning new data gathering projects.
2. We need to market the website redesign and development process more actively within the Libraries.
3. The website redesign and development process needs to be informed by the differences between user and librarian beliefs, which in itself is one of the key take-aways from the ERP study.
4. Research guides and other current similar efforts need to have their assumptions challenged not only for service effectiveness but also for return on investment. Students are asking to be directed to the appropriate resources particular to their specific research needs. Research guides have traditionally been the Libraries approach to addressing this need, but students don't seem to be generally aware of research guides. Are the libraries receiving a useful return on investment for research guides, given the amount of time and effort involved in creating a research guide? Should more agile and dynamic approaches, such as packaging resources into custom portals, be employed instead? What are our peer institutions doing? It was agreed that the evaluation of the research guide methodology is out of scope for this working group but that the research guide strategy should be evaluated, in light of ERP findings, perhaps by a specific working group tasked by the two councils.
5. Additional recommendations for website improvement are included in the review reports from relevant councils and committees on the Libraries website.

NEXT STEPS

Judy Gardner, Interim Deputy Associate University Librarian for Research and Instructional Services, has been charged to coordinate improvements to our Web presence and digital public services, including work resulting from the ethnographic study and the need to advance implementation of its recommendations. She will partner with the Director of Integrated Information Systems for the Rutgers University Libraries to guarantee that the appropriate commitment and support from both public services and information technology are brought to bear on developing the Libraries website. Judy and the Director will work with members of the newly integrated website team and the Core Team to initiate and oversee the redesign and development process.

Information gathered in this study concerns issues beyond just the Libraries website. All committees and other groups that reviewed comments from the student survey will be requested to review their initial recommendations, taking into consideration the principles, priorities, and strategies in this report, which focuses on the website, as well as the website-focused and more general recommendations in the report on student interviews. They will be requested to incorporate work that will carry out both the website and other recommendations into their planning and goal setting for academic year 2011 and beyond. The Core Team will provide support in the form of additional data gathering and analysis and priority setting, as needed, and track and report on progress over the course of the coming academic year.