

Usability Test: Duke University Libraries Subject Specialists Directory Report

Recommendations

1. Add a full list of subjects at the top to provide more information about available subjects in case patrons are not familiar with the subjects.
2. Program the search/filter function by specific subject rather than by keyword search. The shortcut (Ctrl + F) was used several times and some of the students felt it was just as effective or the same as using the directory.
3. Provide suggestions or alternative paths when there is no result shown for the search term input. A use case could be: display “please check Medical Center Librarian Staff Directory” when patrons are searching a medical librarian. Through our observation, students were lost when they search something that doesn’t indexed by the search function.
4. If possible, provide “Schedule an Appointment” button for each librarian. For librarians who don’t have available calendar to book, maybe consider set the link to open up an email.
5. Consider doing usability testing on the “research guides” tab to see if more information is needed. These guides are often created by the specific librarian of that subject for the purpose of assisting research in the topic/field of their expertise. Many students did not know what “research guides” were but were responsive to using them once they better understood their purpose.

Background

This study was an extension to the testing of staff directory conducted by Samantha Throne and Eden Andes on August 5th, 2019. This study aims to test the usability of the subject specialists directory page in relation to the functionality and experience of the search filter. Testing was conducted with a computer, a script, a pilot, and seven students. The study was developed and conducted by Manhua Wang and Robin Knight, with guidance by Emily Daly and Thomas Crichlow. On September 13th, 2019 we recruited seven participants at a table set up in the lobby of Perkins Library at Duke. Each participant was given a voucher for a coffee or snack in exchange for their time. Robin and Manhua moderated the tests jointly.

Questions we hoped to answer through this study:

1. *What will a user use to find a subject specialist if they already know the librarian’s name?*
2. *How easily can a user find a subject specialist in their field or focus of study if they need help?*

3. *How do users interpret the results list from filtering?*
4. *How easily can a user understand the wording on the page?*

Participants

Roles at Duke:

- 4 undergraduate students
- 3 graduate students

Had participants used Duke University Libraries before?

- Yes: 5/7
- No: 2/7

Had participants used subject specialists directory to look for a librarian before?

- Yes: 3/5
- No: 2/5

Key findings

1. What will a user use to find a subject specialist if they already know the librarian's name?

Even the subject specialist directory has a "Filter by Subject or Name" function, users used various ways to find the librarian we gave to them:

4/7 participants used filter function to search for the name and they tended to type the full name of the librarian instead of stopping after the result showed.

For the rest of 3 participants, one of them went to Staff A-Z directory, one of them used "Search by name..." function, and the other used Ctrl + F to find the name. When asked their reasons in not using the filter function, 2 students mentioned they didn't notice the filter box, and one said she usually used Ctrl + F to search and felt the search box is the same as Ctrl + F.

The results here suggest that most users tend to use the filter function but there always are other options available for users.

2. How easily can a user find a subject specialist in their field or focus of study if they need help?

5/7 participants successfully found a librarian specialized in their focus of study. Among these 5 students, 2 of them already knew the librarians' name – they used this directory to meet with a

subject specialist before; 3 of them searched the subject's name either using the search box (2 students) or using Ctrl + F (1 student). The student who used Ctrl + F mentioned that there were a lot of subject titles but she didn't know what subject under what title.

2/7 students didn't find a librarian specialized in their field of study. One student is from Divinity School – which is separated from the DUL systems – so he couldn't find a librarian on this page. This student said that he would not use this directory as it did not locate a librarian for him. Another student believed he found a librarian specialized in Public Policy (even he mentioned he didn't know this person exist) but according to that librarian's summary, we believe that this is not the matched one.

The findings showed that experienced students could find a specialist through name search and new users could still find a specialist if their field of study is in the list. However, one participant mentioned in the debriefing time that he felt disappointed and surprised when the subject he searched didn't come up and he didn't know the next step when he saw "No results".

In addition, when using the search box, one student were confused by the term 'name' and did not know if this meant name of a person or something other.

3. How do users interpret the results list from filtering?

3/7 students felt the search bar yielded swift results and were satisfied.

3/7 students found the results confusing or incomplete. 2 participants thought it confusing that the same person was mentioned several times: one student filled the gap herself believing that the librarian she noticed was specialized in several areas; another student mentioned that the subject doesn't always match their title. One student was not sure whether these subjects were actual department and he also had question about how they categorized. One student mentioned there were a lot of things missing in here (e.g., roman study, Spanish, France, etc.).

The findings showed the efficiency and the reaction speed of the search box function, but also revealed the less organized results yielded through searching.

4. How easily can a user understand the wording on the page?

3/7 students mentioned they were unsure of what "research guides" are or how to use them.

3/7 students mentioned they like the "Schedule an Appointment" function. And 3/7 students noticed that some librarians had buttons for scheduling an appointment, but others don't, which made them confused.

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October 4, 2019

Overall, the wording on the page is understandable except a few library jargons. The contents on the page was not that consistent but we think it's because some librarians do not have public schedules.

Appendix A: Test Script

Hi, are you a student here? We're with the Duke library system and would like your help and opinion on how you interact with our website. If you have a few minutes we'd love for you to take a look at a particular page and let us know how helpful you find it. We also have some (snacks) for your participation.

[Pending their interest] Awesome! Thank you for volunteering to participate in the study. My name is [name] and I will be walking you through our task today. This is [name] and she will be taking notes. I will mostly be reading from a script to ensure each testing session is as consistent as possible.

We only have a few general questions to ask and two tasks, it should only take around [number to be tested in pilot] minutes. Don't worry about going too fast or too slow. There are no right or wrong actions here because we're testing the website, not you. So, feel free to provide opinions and feedback; it won't hurt our feelings.

Do you have any questions so far?

We have just three questions to begin with.

[Pre Test Questions]

Now, let's begin our tasks. Please tell us what you're thinking while doing these tasks so that we can get an idea of your thought process.

[Task 1]

If you'll take a look at the page, we have on the screen here and we're going to give you a name of a specialized librarian to look up.

[hands student the name written out]

[Record]

- *Action of searching (What steps do they take to search)*
- *Observation*
 - *Behavioral: scrolling, searching intention*
 - *Emotional: frustration, excitement*
- *Other comments and special things noticed*

[Post Task Question]

- *How do you feel about the results?*

[Clear search bar.]

[Task 2]

Now, if you'll imagine you need to contact a specialized librarian either in your field or in the subject of one of your classes, please show how might you begin this? [pause] Did you find what you were looking for?

[Record]

- *Action of searching (What steps do they take to search)*
- *Observation*
 - *Behavioral: scrolling, searching intention*
 - *Emotional: frustration, excitement*
- *Other comments and special things noticed*

[Post Test Question]

- *How do you feel about the results?*

[After the student has completed both tasks, we will then ask the follow up questions.]

Great! Thank you for your time and input today. Your opinion is extremely valuable to us.

Appendix B: Pre-test questionnaire

1. Which of the following describes you best?
 - a. Undergraduate Student
 - b. Graduate Student
 - c. Doctoral Student
 - d. Faculty
 - e. Staff
 - f. Other: _____

2. Have you used the Duke Libraries Website before?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

3. [If yes] Have you used the site to find librarians specialized in a subject?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

Appendix C: Post-test questionnaire

1. What do you like best about this directory?
2. What do you like about this directory least?
3. How do you feel about using this filter so far?
4. Do you have other comments or suggestions?