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Summary from Student Advisory Board on Subject Specialist Directory Test

Recommendations

1. Merge subjects with repeated items included. For example, Center for Data and Visualization Sciences appears under 4 subjects starting with "Data" and also under Mapping and GIS; maybe consider merging "Data"-titled subjects to one.
2. Add a description on how library staff could help students with their study or research. This could encourage users to find this directory and make use of library resources. Examples of where this description could be are: (1) using grey hint text under the big title "Subject Specialists"; (2) consider put the text next to the filter box.
3. Consider adding subjects related to technical skills like programming. For now, if students want to find programmers / developers, they need to go to full staff list and find "digital humanities" related information about the staff.
4. Provide more subjects options for "Filter by Subject or Name" instead of just using highly searched subjects. For example, currently there is not "Biomedical Engineer" subject on the page but the library has a subject specialist librarian (i.e., Sarah Park) in this field. Two potential solutions could be: (1) Add sub-subjects on the page instead of just listing major subjects; (2) adding sub-specialists tags next to librarians' pictures under their titles. We recommend the second solution which could still keep all subjects listed at the same major subjects levels.
5. For external links directing to other institutions (e.g., Scholar Works), link the webpage with the list of librarians' basic information instead of the main page if possible, like the current link for Divinity School, which lists all librarians.
6. Consider consistency with the appointment scheduling option as many students questioned why appointments were not available for all librarians. If not available for all, an alternative way should be provided explicitly. An example of alternatives could be having "Schedule an Appointment" button for every librarian but for those who don't have online booking calendar, direct this button to a template email form which allows patrons to type in their contact information and reasons for contact. If this is not possible, adding a simple text (not button) at the same place as "Schedule an Appointment" button saying "Email to Schedule Appointment" would also help.

For more information, please contact emily.daly@duke.edu

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Background

This study aimed to gather more feedback on the updated Subject Specialist Directory[1] from student advisory board. The handout for the testing was developed by Robin Knight and Manhua Wang, with the guidance of Emily Daly, Thomas Crichlow and Angela Zoss. Two tests were conducted at an Undergraduate Student Advisory Board Meeting (UAB) on October 21st, 2019 and Graduate and Professional Student Advisory Board Meeting (GPSAB) on September 30th, 2019. Due to the time limit, the GPSAB only completed task 2 – finding a subject specialist librarian in their field of study. UAB completed all three tasks.

Questions we hoped to answer through this study:

1. *What were the steps taken while searching for a librarian's assistance with a class project?*
2. *What their steps when searching for a librarian in their field of study?*
3. *What their steps when searching for a librarian in the field of science?*
4. *What were students' experience in using this directory?*

Participants:

Roles at Duke

- 6 graduate / professional students (only completed task 2)
- 9 undergraduate students (completed all 3 tasks)

Had participants used Staff Directory to locate information this semester or previous ones?

- 6 / 15 students used the old version of the staff directory and one of them saw the new one recently

What did participants do and what were their experiences towards the old version?

- They were looking for subject librarians to help with their homework or research
- Students thought it's easy to use in terms of finding helpful librarians and scheduling appointments

Key Findings

1. What were the steps taken while searching for a librarian's assistance with a class project? (Undergrad Response Only)

5/9 scrolled through lists of topics once in data visualization until they found what they needed. 1/9 went to "research report" first. 1/9 stated they just searched for "information" in the search box. 1/9 used "Ctrl + F" to begin her search. All reported that they found what they were looking for.

[1] *Note: by the time of the UAB and GPSAB meetings, the "Filter by Subject or Name" had changed compared to the one tested on September 13th, 2019. See the previous report.*

1/9 wished there was box that had predetermined samples provided on the reason for contacting and emailing certain individuals. 2/9 found the "Center for Data and Visualization Services" easy to navigate. 5/9 felt that the results were expansive, with a large variety of librarians and analysts to reach out to. 1/9 felt it would be easier to have an online appointment center instead of email. 1/9 found this section to be well organized. 1/9 found it the results to be information overload, further stating that if this was her major, it would be easier to find this information.

2. **What their steps when searching for a librarian in their field of study? (Both Undergrad & Grad/Professional Response)**

8/15 students used the function of "Filter by Subject or Name" to search for subject specialist librarian and 6/8 of them stated they found what they were looking for. The graduate student who didn't think he found what he expected mentioned that Divinity Librarians are divided by media instead of subjects. The undergrad student who didn't find the results typed "biomedical engineering" into the filter but got zero results. For undergrad students who used this function, they all claimed that they wish to have more than one librarian under the subjects they were searching.

5/15 student browsed the list and found a librarian in her field and they all found the librarian they would like to talk to. Through browsing, one graduate student mentioned that she could make sure there wasn't anybody else who shared the same related expertise. Among the 4 undergrad respondents, 1 student already knew the librarian he was looking for and the other 3 students held the fields of study starting with "E" which were listed topper on the subject specialist list. These 4 undergrad students all thought it was easy to find the results and one of them mentioned the "research guide" was helpful and the other student hoped there were "Schedule an Appointment" buttons for all subjects.

The remaining 2/15 students used "Ctrl + F" to find the librarian they wanted to meet with and thought it was easy to find.

3. **What their steps when searching for a librarian in the field of science? (Undergrad Response Only)**

4/7 participants felt they found what they were looking for. 3/7 were uncertain if they found what they were looking for. 3/7 began by searching for science. 3/7 scrolled and browsed through the science section. 1/7 stated they figured out which specific area of science they were looking for, and then clicked on that area's librarian.

Summary and thoughts about these results: 5/7 felt that "science" was too broad of a category to search for, describing it as vague as well. One asked, "Is there a way to search by subject specialists only, (no centers, staff, etc.)? Another stated, "Since "science" is so broad, I enjoyed that the results were grouped on further sub fields." 1/7 participants said they felt confused on

which science librarian to contact. 1/7 stated that you would need to dig deeper to find more specific information.

4. What were students' experience in using this directory?

9/11 students who responded to the post-test questions thought this directory was easy to use as it quickly generated results and they would recommend to their friends. And 6/9 of them mentioned that the "contact information" and "schedule an appointment" button were straightforward and helpful without even clicking into the librarians' page.

4 undergraduate students who used the "Filter by Subject or Name" mentioned its effectiveness. 4 undergraduate students and 1 graduate student who didn't use the function provided by the directory either used "Ctrl + F" to search keyword or just browsed the page. Students who scrolled to browse the page all mentioned their willingness to explore different options in case they missed something.

4 undergraduate students mentioned they liked the construction of the page including the layout, the way the librarians were organized (by subject and alphabetically ordered)

1 student mentioned that the expertise under librarians was too generic.

Both graduate and undergraduate students also mentioned that the levels of details under each topic seemed various depending on the subjects and librarian's title. For example, the librarian listed under a subject only has title, while an organization / center listed under has a descriptive paragraph. Related to this point, students mentioned that low level of details required users to explore research guides to get connection between a librarian and the subject. Some undergraduate students also mentioned that a lack of details made them unsure about who to contact. Students mentioned that they don't want to waste someone's time if they are not a match or they are not willing to contact the head of a department if that's the only choice.

The repeated concern raised both in the lobby testing and the student advisory board is that librarians have inconsistencies when it comes to scheduling appointments. Some librarians have "Schedule an Appointment" button and others don't. Students were confused when the option is only emailing because they are unsure about which person to contact (e.g., both Heather Martin and John Gartrell appear under African American Studies, but only Heather's description includes the "Schedule an Appointment" button.

Appendix A. Handout for Student Advisory Board

Task 1

You are taking an information visualization course. You want to talk to a librarian about your final project about data visualization. Please use this directory to locate a librarian you could talk to about your project.

Q1 What steps did you take?

Q2 Did you find what you were looking for?

Q3 What are your thoughts about the results?

Task 2

You'd like to meet with a librarian who specializes in your field of study to talk about your research. Please use this directory to find a librarian you could talk to about your area of study. Your area of study:

Q1 What steps did you take?

Q2 Did you find what you were looking for?

Q3 What are your thoughts about the results?

Task 3

You're curious to learn more about the library staff who specialize in the field of science. Please use this directory to find more information about those who specialize in science.

Q1 What steps did you take?

Q2 Did you find what you were looking for?

Q3 What are your thoughts about the results?

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Please answer the following questions.

1. **Did you use the "Filter by Subject or Name" search bar for any of your tasks today?**
   a. **Yes** b. **No**

2. **[If yes] What's your experience in using this search function?**

3. **[If no] How did you complete your search? What led you to choose that method of searching?**

4. **Overall, what did you find most helpful about this directory?**

5. **Overall, what did you find least helpful about this directory?**

6. **Would you recommend this directory to a friend? Why, or why not?**

7. **Other thoughts, comments, or suggestions?**

Name (optional): _____
Your department/program: _____