Simplifying the Library Experience: Better Serving Regional Campus Users

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Simplifying the Library Experience: BETTER SERVING REGIONAL CAMPUS USERS

ABOUT USU EASTERN
Utah State University Eastern was formed after a merger between the College of Eastern Utah and Utah State University in 2010. USU Eastern is a unique campus situated in Utah’s remote southeast and has a large population of Native American students. The Blanding campus supports dozens of learning centers in the Four-Corners region, providing educational access across 40,000 square miles, half of which are in tribal lands.

In all, USU features four regional campuses and twenty-six centers (see Fig 1.), with over 14,187 regional campus and online students throughout the region. The Price and Blanding campuses both have dedicated library facilities.

CHALLENGES

Location - Remote, rural areas, limited internet access, distance from main campus librarians

Multiple Library Websites - Separate main (Logan, UT) campus and regional sites create inconsistency and divided access points to library materials and expertise.

Fewer interactions - Limited opportunities for in-person library instruction and other interactions makes it difficult to know how to tailor online presence to best meet the needs of regional users, let alone improve access and usability.

USABILITY TESTING

During a visit to the USU Blanding Campus, librarians recruited students to participate in a 10-15 minute usability test. Librarians collected information on class status, major, and the general research and library experience of participants.

Using a laptop, participants demonstrated how they would normally access the library website. Librarians observed which website they visited and method of access (e.g. Google or the student service website).

Next, using the Blanding Library website, participants were asked to find a book for a research project, then find information about getting a book from the Logan campus library (typical information on our regional and online help pages). Finally, participants were asked to review our regional and online student help pages, with questions like:

- “Looking at this page, does this have the information you were expecting?”
- “What does it seem like you can do here? What stands out to you?”

FINDINGS

- Students are accessing main library website instead of Blanding site, which was not optimized for Eastern locations
- Local site is difficult to find via Google and absent from student service site
- Too much information - cognitive overload
- Students prefer to not have to ask for help
- Students appreciate tutorials when made aware of resources
- Internet/computer access is limited for many students
- Need to optimize for speed and mobile use (and cell networks)

IMPROVING THE UX

Based on the results of usability testing, the main USU Libraries website could do more to support all USU students regardless of location. By rebranding as “USU Libraries,” the main library website can be more inclusive, as well as accessible to all students.

Additionally, rather than overloading students with “just in case” information, library websites and guides can better support students by providing quick and easy access to tools and information at the point of need.

A key part of this is redesigning websites to focus on supporting the core tasks all students need to accomplish in order to achieve their research and academic goals.