

**Princeton University Library Website Usability Study**  
**Final Report**  
**Submitted December 13, 2013**

## OVERVIEW

The Usability Task Force, a subset of the Library’s Website Steering Group, conducted a study of the Library’s website between November 20<sup>th</sup> and November 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2013. The primary purpose of this new round of testing was 1) to determine problem areas and validate improvements made since the last usability testing (February 2013); and 2) understand user needs, assumptions, and expectations of the new site so as to identify future enhancements.

Ten participants<sup>1</sup> were tested, individually, with thirteen questions which addressed a number of different areas within the new website site. The rationale behind the questions used in the testing stem from areas deemed problematic in the February study. We also wanted to identify problematic areas that have since emerged following the site’s official campus launch in September 2013. A list of the test questions are attached in Appendix A.

## PART I. BACKGROUND

When asked why they come to the Library’s website and how they go about starting their research, testers’ responses fell into two distinct camps. The faculty and graduate students relied on the website largely for service-oriented information, hours, ILL, Borrow Direct, remote access, etc., whereas the undergraduates typically started with the Library’s website when kicking off their research, starting with the All Search or Books+. The faculty and graduate students generally knew what database or tool to deploy and either had them bookmarked or accessed them via the Main Catalog (as a title or keyword search), which many testers referred to as the “old library website.” The undergraduates, especially the freshmen, did not yet have a “favorite” resource and found that the Articles+ search met their research needs. Though a dedicated Main Catalog user, the faculty member conceded that the new website – the All Search – was useful if one did not know what they were searching for but not so useful for known item searches.

## PART II. FINDING MATERIALS IN THE LIBRARY

### **Known Items**

In general, testers were successful using the Library website to search Princeton’s collections. Whether using the All Search, Main Catalog or Books+, known items in the Library’s collection were quite easy for testers to find. All testers were successful in finding the ReCAP book titles (question 5) and those accustomed to placing ReCAP requests were quickly able to walk us through the process. The freshmen were thrown by the term “ReCAP” – they didn’t know what it meant and got a little lost trying to determine the book’s status from the All search brief record. But even the newer students found their title and successfully got to the ReCAP request form. Additionally, most testers were able to find the *Journal of Urban Technology* (question 4) in either the Main Catalog or the All Search but only those using the Main Catalog were able to correctly identify Princeton’s complete holdings for this journal.

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<sup>1</sup> 1 faculty – history; 2 freshmen; 1 sophomore – geosciences; 2 seniors – sociology / politics; 4 graduates – architecture / music / chemistry / history.

The online item record in Books+ and the All Search seemed to obscure information about the print holdings for the testers and it did not occur to them that there might be a print format available – even though the Primo record indicated that there might be print holdings. The freshmen, in particular, had the most trouble and relied first on Articles+ and then on the Databases tab as a way to find this journal.

### ***Specific Resources or Topics***

When testers were asked to find materials or research topics with which they were unfamiliar, there was less of a common understanding about what they should do and how to find the material. The faculty and graduate students gravitated towards the Main Catalog as the first step, and in part were successful in finding information about data sets (question 6) or microfinance and women (question 7). However, they did not look closely at the Library's front page to determine if there were additional options available to support these types of research topics. Those testers using the All search seemed satisfied with what was retrieved and successfully found additional records for books and articles from the All results page. In instances where the tester simply got stuck, the instinct was to revise the search or apply the search to another tab; few testers thought to contact the library for help, determine if a research guide or subject specialist is available, etc., despite the numerous links available on every page. There were a couple of instances when testers searched for "microfinance and women" in the databases tab, expecting to find related databases (this had also happened with the February study).

## **PART III. FINDING LIBRARY SERVICES**

Testers seemed comfortable navigating the site when asked to find information about specific services; the design made sense to them and they found the overall layout relatively intuitive. The most common form of navigation was the back button followed by the PUL logo in the upper left-hand corner. If testers went in one direction which led to a dead end (e.g. when trying to "recommend a purchase"), they successfully backed out of that strategy and found alternative ways to resolve their questions. The "contact" option in the top black menu served as a useful backup for many of the testers who could not find the specific service or resource that we asked them to find. The undergraduates made more use of the All Search when looking for library-specific information.

As with the last study, testers found the hours section incredibly useful. However, most testers mistook the hours intermediary page for the branch's actual website. Few testers successfully navigated to a branch's homepage whether from the intermediary page or the Libraries and Collections drop-down menu. For questions relating to services, testers made regular use of the Footer when they could not find what they needed above the fold. Areas largely overlooked included the "Information For" section, the Libraries and Collections menu, the About menu, and the additional buttons within the different search tabs (e.g., E-Journals Finder, Advanced Search, etc.).

Testers uniformly were confused by the blue menu bar – the language, the mechanics (e.g. why just one option expands and not the others), and the content within the pages themselves. Testers had difficulty intuiting the difference between the Research and Services menu and often consulted both when trying to find a service, as if the menus' contents were interchangeable; what testers expected to find in Research were topics or links that were listed within Services and vice versa. Moreover, the organizational choices for the Research and Services pages confused testers – what constituted "core" resources, what are "finding aids", and so on.

All testers had trouble finding information about the bibliographic management workshops (question 10). The common strategy was to look in the Research or Services menus, find nothing, move on to the footer, and eventually give up or try a few keyword searches which retrieved the relevant information. In one case, a tester tried the Student portal and found the related link there.

#### PART IV. GENERAL OBSERVATIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

**Research & Services Menus:** Given the confusion these two menus caused testers, we suggest developing a single menu combining the content of both these pages. Additionally, links included within this page should be briefly annotated, informing users of what the link is. For example, a student presumed that the Finding Aids link would take her to some sort of informational knowledgebase about the Library. The overall layout of this page could also be improved upon – perhaps featuring categories of information made visually distinct from one another, rather than a single list of links.

**About & Contact Menus:** Few testers made use of the About menu and many were not sure what sort of information would fall within this category. Perhaps additional usage statistics for this button can be generated and would further confirm that this button, despite its prominent place, receives little to no use. (The February study also found that About menu was seldom used.) The Black Navigation Bar also received little use in the testing with the exception of the Contact form, which many testers used to address a number of different questions. This suggests that the Contact form should be given more prominence and enhanced with a core suite of contact information and links to request forms.

**Intermediary Hours Pages & Branch Pages:** We recommend revising these intermediary hours page by 1) reducing the redundancy of information (note the various ways in which hours are listed on the page); 2) rethinking the organization of the page – perhaps toning down the map and enhancing navigation to the branch pages; and/or 3) replacing the intermediary pages – or links to these pages – with the branch pages themselves. In relation to the third option, we suggest exploring different templates or, at the very least, some standard components tying the various branch pages together.

**Confusion / Concern about Books+ and Articles+:** There was some general confusion among the faculty and graduate testers about what exactly was being searched in Books+ and Articles+. While testers knew that Books+ searched the Princeton collections, they were not convinced Books+ was searching the all its content as effectively as the Main Catalog. The trouble with the *Journal of Urban Technology* question, for example, confirmed this seeming disparity in content for them. However, when prompted to search both systems and analyze those results, the testers were comfortable with limiting the Books+ search results by format, date, revising the search terms, etc.

**Additional Issues:**

- *Information Portals:* These were seldom used but when a student did access the student portal, the terminology and organization of that information was a little confusing, particularly information in the Research Education section. The larger issue is the necessity of these portals and if deemed necessary, how to better organization and clarify the information present within them.

- *Footer:* We recommend that the menu headings in the footer (Research, Services, Help, etc.), be hyperlink to the appropriate “more” menu. A number of testers tried clicking on these headings and discovered that they were just headings.
- *Staff Directory:* We also recommend exploring tagging options for staff profiles in the directory. When asked to find their subject specialist, one tester entered her subject area into the staff directory and retrieved nothing (geosciences).
- *General Look & Feel:* As testers were navigating between the home pages, libguides, Articles+, etc., a few suggested that the overall site could be more visually cohesive. Based on the look of a given page, besides the home pages, it was not clear to some of the testers that they were still within the PUL web universe.

## APPENDIX A: USABILITY STUDY QUESTIONS

### Usability Testing Princeton University Library Fall Semester 2013

#### Introduction

Thank you for agreeing to help test the Princeton University Library web site. Any criticism you have is very welcome and we encourage you to be frank in sharing your impressions, negative and positive, because that will help us improve the site. This is really important, as you are playing a role here to help refine this implementation so that we can advise the designers to address potential problems.

I am going to ask you a series of xx questions. These questions are pretty typical tasks people need to do on the web site, with its catalog, and other research tools. Nothing is designed to be a trick question. I'm not interested in judging your abilities in using these services; I'm interested in seeing how well the web site works for people with a variety of experience using library resources.

It would be most helpful if you think aloud as you do the tasks. Feel free to ask me any questions during the tasks; however, I typically won't answer you until the end of the session, as I'm trying to see how intuitive the site will be for a person to use without guidance from staff.

I would like to record the session, if that is okay with you. There is software on this laptop, which will record your face, what you say, and what you do on the screen. This recording will help us to evaluate the tests and evaluate the systems. I will share the results of recordings only with Princeton library staff. In the write up of results no individuals will be identified. I will show highlights of recorded sessions to Princeton staff only, but they will not be disseminated beyond that.

Please read the release and sign it if you are okay with recording the session. I'm going to give you the incentive we promised you now, for coming in. This session should last about 45 minutes. If at any time you want to stop the test, just tell me and we will stop. The incentive is yours to keep even if we end the session early.

Do you have any questions for me before we start?

#### Background

- A. I'd like to start by learning a little bit about you and your work.
  - 1a. **For a student:** What year are you in in your studies? What is your major/area of research?
  - 1b. **For a faculty member:** what do you teach this semester? Are you doing any research?
  2. What do you generally come to the PUL website for?
  3. Please describe how you go about starting your research. What sites, sources or databases do you find yourself using the most?

## Tasks/Questions

Start at <http://library.princeton.edu/>

This is the new web site for the library. I'd like you to start here to answer the questions I'm now going to ask. When you are answering the questions, I'm going to ask that you stay within the library pages themselves.

B. I'd now like to ask some questions about finding material in the library.

4. How can you access the *Journal of Urban Technology*? Can you tell me how far back Princeton's holdings go?
5. Find a copy of "Book X". Where is the book located? Is it possible to request a copy for delivery to your home library? If so, then please do so.
6. You're working on your senior thesis and need data sets relating to public opinion surveys in Latin America. Show us how you would find this information.
7. You are writing a paper on microfinance and women; how would you find scholarship related to this topic?
  - a. If they search via All Search and stay on that page:
    - i. I'd like you to take a look at all the resources returned by your search. Could you just take a moment to look at this page and talk to me about what you notice? Does anything strike you as confusing or odd? Is what you see here the extent of what Princeton has on this topic?
  - b. If they select the Books+ tab:
    - i. What's your assessment of these results?
    - ii. Is this all of the books Princeton owns on this topic?
    - iii. Try limiting your results to current publications.
  - c. If they select the Articles+ tab:
    - i. What's your assessment of these results?
    - ii. Are these all the articles published on this topic?
    - iii. Try narrowing your results to newspaper articles.
8. For either system: go back to the library home page. [If the tester uses the logo to navigate, ask if this is where they expected to land.]

C. Now, I'm going to ask you about finding general library services through the website.

9. You're writing a term paper relating to your major and you'd like some help getting started. Are there any options for getting help from the library? Show me how you would find them. Can you identify who the appropriate librarian is to contact about your topic?
10. Where would you look for information about the library's bibliographic citation management classes like Zotero or Endnote?
11. How would you go about suggesting a book purchase or a journal subscription for the library's consideration?

12. You would like to watch a recording of an opera in the Music Library. Show me how to determine if this is possible.

#### D. Concluding Questions

13. What's your general impression of the website? Is there anything missing here that you would expect to find? Anything you find extraneous or unnecessary?