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Volume 13, numéro 2, 2018

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1102535ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.18438/ebliip29405>

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Éditeur(s)

University of Alberta Library

ISSN

1715-720X (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer ce document

Matthews, L. (2018). Terminology for Librarian Help on the Home Page. *Evidence Based Library and Information Practice*, 13(2), 83–88.
<https://doi.org/10.18438/ebliip29405>

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Using Evidence in Practice

Terminology for Librarian Help on the Home Page

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Received: 7 Feb. 2018

Accepted: 17 Apr. 2018

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Setting

The University of Texas at Arlington (UTA) is a public university serving over 40,000 students, reaching nearly 50,000 when online students are calculated. There are three libraries on campus: Central Library, Architecture and Fine Arts Library, and Science and Engineering Library. Central Library has six floors including a basement. Students in this study were recruited from all three libraries. UTA libraries have a diverse user community and UTA itself was named one of the most diverse campuses in the US in a study done by the US News and World Report (2018).

Problem

Librarians at UTA began an email conversation about terminology to use on the home page that is easy to understand for

users. One of our librarians stated that we should “include more areas of expertise that work directly with our users” while creating language that would make librarians findable on the home page. The librarians began to propose terms they thought users would choose to search for them on the library home page. Instead of weighing in on librarian-proposed terms from only librarians, we decided to ask our user community since they are users or potential users of the home page. To improve the way users access our “expertise” for assistance, we must include them to understand their search process.

Our librarians have backgrounds in areas such as open educational resources (OER) and data literacy that exist outside their normal duties. We want to market those skills to make our librarians more accessible to users. First, we needed to figure out which labels users preferred from the librarian-proposed terms

when they searched for a librarian on our home page. Were we generating user-friendly terminology that was intuitive for librarian discoverability? We also wanted to figure out what they expected to “see” once a particular label was chosen by asking their expectations for the landing page. Determining this expectation would help us discover users’ understanding of these labels.

Evidence

At UTA, the Digital Creation and Assessment departments collaborated to conduct a usability study to find out the terms users preferred when they searched for librarian assistance on the home page. A paper prototype of the library home page was used where students pointed to terms they thought would help them find librarians. Term refers to the labels or language used on the home page that link to other webpages. Librarians proposed terms they thought would help users to locate them. These terms were shared via email and open to all twenty-one of our librarians. Some librarians proposed new terms, while others agreed with some of the suggested terms. We added these terms on the home page.

The paper prototype looked similar to Figure 1.

There were a total of 26 labels for the right side of the home page, including the terms proposed by librarians. The dropdown menus were expanded on the paper prototype making it easier to “navigate.” This paper will focus on the usability study for the right-side of the home page. This is where the original term (Librarians by Subject) that linked directly to librarians was located.

Librarians proposed seven terms/labels they thought would be useful when users searched for a librarian:

Librarians by Subject (previous – before the usability test)

1. Librarians by Academic Subject (current – after the usability test)
2. Librarians by Expertise
3. Librarians by Academic Discipline
4. Librarians by Area of Expertise
5. Librarians by Specialty
6. Areas of Expertise
7. Assistance by Expertise

We recruited 14 students to participate in the usability testing. We asked the participants to point to the label they would click on to find a librarian under two circumstances: 1) seeking assistance in their major and 2) seeking assistance outside their major.

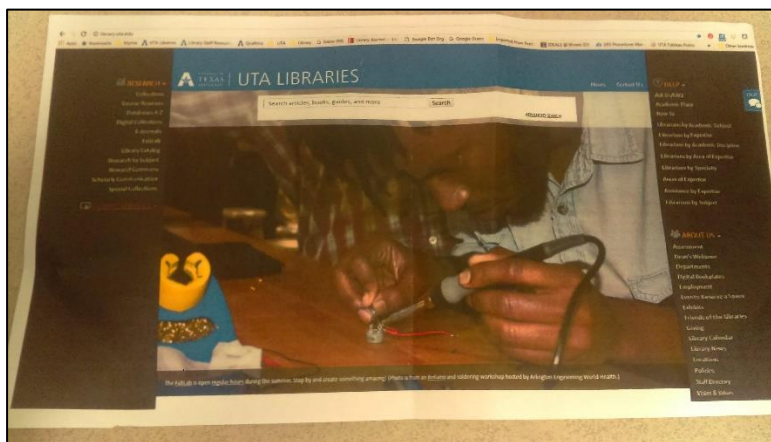


Figure 1
Paper prototype of the home page.

We presented the paper prototype to each student and used a semi-structured approach, using a set of questions as a guide, not a prescriptive, rigid survey. We asked questions to identify their preferred labels and what they expected to see on that landing page. We identified two possible search questions that correspond with the above circumstances. Students may have these questions in mind when seeking librarian assistance:

1. When looking for help from a librarian for information related to your major, what link would you choose?
2. When looking for help from a librarian for information outside your major, what link would you choose?

With this user-centered approach we were able to gather students' preferences for labels when seeking librarian assistance. While we considered asking student workers, we knew that students who work for the library may be biased or have a better understanding of searching for librarian assistance, since they work with librarians almost daily. Because of this knowledge, we decided to ask random students in the library.

"Librarians by Academic Subject" was chosen most often (Table 1). This label was chosen at a higher rate for question one, relating to their major, which may be obvious because of the word "academic." However, the amount of clicks it received was unexpected. Language made a significant difference in how students searched.

There was no difference when comparing the current and original labels for question 2: searching for librarian help outside their major (Figure 2. red bars). We can assume that there needs to be specific language that affords this type of search, especially if librarians want to market their various skills to students.

Once a term was "clicked," students were asked what they expected to see on the following page. We wanted to find out what they thought they would discover once they

chose a link. Students expected to see similar information on these landing pages across all librarian-proposed terms. Expectations included seeing a list of librarians, college departments by major, and librarian contact information. When "Librarians by Expertise" was chosen, one student commented that they expected the librarian to have a MA or PhD in that subject.

Fessenden's (2010) eye tracking study found that 80% of web users look at the left side of the screen while 20% look at the right side of the screen. Our usability study showed that students chose labels most often from the right side of the screen. However, this does not negate the fact that they may have mostly looked on the left side of the screen. Eye tracking could have been useful to find out where students look for discoverability of librarians, but it was not part of our study. According to Pernice (2017) users' motivation impacts what they click. So, our users' choice in labels may have been impacted by the two questions asked as opposed to finding labels under actual circumstances.

Involving students in this study to gather feedback about how they search the library home page was more user-centered than allowing librarians to assume how users search. Our actual or potential users were our best resource for evidence.

Implementation

On the UTA library website, "Librarians by Subject" was changed to "Librarians by Academic Subject" based on the usability testing conducted. The Digital Creation department made changes to the website within weeks of providing the findings from the paper prototypes. No other website changes were made at that time.

The evidence from students showed us their preferred language when searching for librarians. The implementation of this new, or rather improved label was intended to clarify language and meaning as it relates to seeking librarians on the home page.

Table 1
The Percentage of Label Clicks^a

PROPOSED TERMS	TOTAL PERCENTAGE OF CLICKS
Librarians by Academic Subject (Current term)	30%
Librarians by Expertise	15%
Librarians by Academic Discipline	3%
Librarians by Area of Expertise	6%
Librarians by Specialty	9%
Areas of Expertise	6%
Assistance by Expertise	6%
Librarians by Subject (Original term)	12%
Ask Us	9%
Request an Appointment	3%

^aLibrarian-proposed terms are shaded

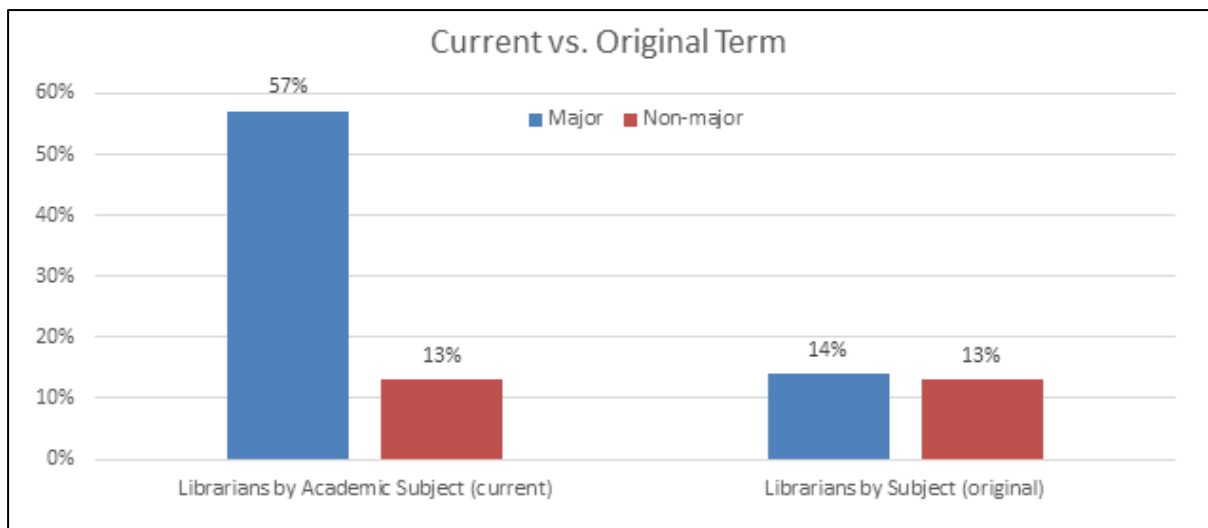


Figure 2
Preference for terms on library home page.

Table 2
Page Views for 2016 and 2017 for Subject Librarians

	2016 June – September	2017 June – September
Page Views	1557	2199

Outcome

There was a 39% increase in clicks for “Librarians by Academic Subject” from summer 2016 to summer 2017 (see Table 2).

“Librarians by Academic Subject” received 32% of all page views, reiterating that the label change was successful. However, when it came to finding librarian help outside the student’s major, none of the librarian-proposed terms were strong contenders. “Librarians by Expertise” received the greatest number of clicks (3 of 19 total clicks). Since “Librarians by Academic Subject” received the most page views overall, it is a starting point for placing those extra skills librarians have on that page, as well as for better accessibility.

Students chose other labels from the website as well, such as “Ask Us.” This shows that we are losing a portion of our student population (12%) when they are seeking librarian assistance. Some are not using the labels we expect them to use. Also, searching for librarian assistance outside their major (Question 2) held no significant click rate for any one particular label; the librarian-proposed labels were chosen one to two times. This finding shows that we need better labels that are intuitive and that resonate with students when they search for a librarian on the home page. There was not a significant amount for any other librarian-proposed term chosen outside of “Librarians by Academic Subject.” Was this because most of the proposed terminology did not resonate with our users when searching for librarian assistance?

Students also provided their own labels, such as “Librarians by Research Interest,” “Librarian Assistance by Expertise” and “Librarian Assistance by Specialty.” Further research would allow students to create labels instead of choosing from terms generated by librarians. According to Gillis (2017) knowing certain terms does make navigating easier, but we must be aware that jargon can create obstacles for new users. Allowing our users to create labels may make their search easier.

Reflection

The data collection process was straightforward due to the consistency in questioning and methodology.

This study could be improved. The librarian-proposed terms were shown as a list and “Librarians by Academic Subject” could have created a bias since it was the first listed. To limit the amount of paper illustrating the various places for the terminology, we decided to list the terms together, using one sheet. We could also improve the way the study was implemented. For example, in the future, we should ask students what they prefer, without presenting them with labels to choose from. Their language, or suggestions for labels, strongly reflected ours. They used similar terms as ours such as “expertise” and “specialty.” Students’ suggested labels could have been influenced by the labels that were presented to them, even those that were already on the website.

Optimally, the usability study would be done on a computer, randomizing the locations of the librarian proposed terms with students doing real-time research in the context of what they are studying. Relating to our goal, the literature talks about marketing or “effectively sharing” the services and expertise of librarians (Benedetti, 2017). We want the best labels to be able to communicate to users the range of skills that UTA librarians possess.

Our results are satisfying, but more work should be done to simplify language for improved online accessibility to meet users’ needs.

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