LibGuides Usability 2

Summary & Goals

The User Research Center conducted testing on two research guides: Criminal Justice, Harvard Kennedy School (HKS) library, and Technology, Innovation, and Education (TIE) program guide, Gutman Library (HGSE). Participants were asked to do research without guidance first and then asked to do the same research using the guides. A related test for accessibility was conducted on the same two guides in summer 2017.

Research Questions

- How well is the new side navigation working?
- How do students' start research on their own versus with a specific guide?
- How well are the new profile boxes working?
- Can students find the library home page from the guide?

Project Team

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Outcomes

Participants

15 graduate students from HKS & GSE participated in the testing.

Key Insights

- Searching options that participants used or said they would use for all of the testing sessions were using Google, Hollis+, or reaching out to a professor or teaching assistant for finding sources and background information on a topic.
- No matter the guide, participants looked for the library hours on the guide page. Most of them looked for the hours in the footer of the website. Many also searched for the hours by going back through the "breadcrumb" links. A few participants just Googled the library hours when they could not find them on the website.
- All of the participants liked how the guides put a lot of relevant information about their topic into one space. They all liked using the guides as a starting off point as opposed to starting with a broad search on their own.
- Many participants had comments about how the guides design/layout could be improved.
- In the HKS guide, a few students wondered if the site was only available to HKS students. A few participants wondered how the search was different through Hollis+ as opposed to the Hollis+ search bar provided in the guide. A few participants found the guide to be overwhelming because it was a long list.
- In the TIE guide, the participants used the words “confusing” and “overwhelming” many times to describe the design of the website. Recommendations made by participants were to make the website less wordy and to add headers to each section.
- In both guides, participants found the contact information for the research librarians to be helpful. They liked that they had multiples options for getting in touch with the reference librarians too. Participants said that they would use different ways of contacting the librarians depending on what they needed help with and how urgent their request was.

Recommendations

- Make hours easier to find. Put them in the footer or at the bottom of the guide, since that is where participants first looked for the hours or have them listed big, clear and easy to find on the guides.
- The guides need to be organized in a clearer way instead of in “long lists” which is an observation many participants made. There was too much scrolling. Participants recommended adding headers to each section.
- Make information about the tools on the research guides clearer as to what they do and the information that they have available.
- Many participants said they would start their research by using the aid of a professor or teaching assistant. To make the guides known, the libraries/librarians may have to do some outreach in courses where research guides would be useful.
- Participants liked that it was easy to contact the librarians in a variety of ways. Make this information more visible or even add in what ways the librarians can further help students with their research.

Supporting Documents

View Supporting Documents (HarvardKey Required)