

The NCSU Catalog Research Testbed: A Tool for Evaluating Faceted Library Catalog Interfaces

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ABSTRACT

Many libraries have recently been devoting significant efforts to modernizing their library catalog web interfaces. One popular approach is to create a faceted search interface to the library catalog. Faceted search interfaces can be complex, requiring designers to make many decisions about the placement and display of faceted search design elements on the page. Unfortunately little empirical research exists on how to optimize faceted search interfaces for library catalogs. To facilitate research in this area, the NCSU Libraries has developed the NCSU Catalog Research Testbed, a tool for developing and evaluating faceted library catalog interfaces.

Categories and Subject Descriptors

H.5.2 [INFORMATION INTERFACES AND PRESENTATION]: User Interfaces – *evaluation/methodology, prototyping, screen design.*

General Terms

Design, Human Factors

Keywords

User Interface Design, Faceted Search, Library Catalog, OPAC

1. INTRODUCTION

The Catalog Research Testbed is a tool developed by the Digital Library Initiatives department at North Carolina State University Libraries. This tool is based on CatalogWS, a web services API to the NCSU Libraries catalog [1]. The Testbed is a hosted testing environment that can be tailored to the needs of each research study.

2. TESTBED FEATURES

The Testbed is based on the NCSU Libraries' catalog [2] of over 1.8 million item records. The use of a production quality data store minimizes the negative impact small or poorly formed test collections can have on user interface evaluations.

The Testbed generates fine-grained transaction logs to help researchers compile and analyze data generated from a user study. Examples of logged data points include user search terms, facets selected, items selected, and timestamps to help calculate task duration.

3. TESTBED CONFIGURABILITY

The Testbed supports the creation of highly customized catalog search interfaces using Extensible Stylesheet Language (XSL) and Cascading Style Sheets (CSS) files. Examples of configurable display options include:

- Selection and display of bibliographic and holdings data
- Selection and placement of facets
- Basic styling, including fonts, colors, alignment, etc.



Figure 1. Example Catalog Research Testbed interface.

Additionally, the Testbed can be used to integrate and evaluate experimental library catalog functionality or discovery tools that are not yet supported by the Testbed.

4. CONCLUSION

The goal of this work is provide researchers with a high-quality low-cost testing environment for conducting user research on faceted catalog interfaces. Researchers interested in using the Catalog Research Testbed for their own studies are encouraged to contact the authors to explore a collaboration opportunity.

5. REFERENCES

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