SPEED USABILITY EVALUATION: LIBRARY HOME PAGE SEARCH OPTIONS AND SEARCH COLLECTIONS
May 8, 2004
Bonnie, Yinon, Katherine, Steve, Tripp, and Kelsey

PURPOSE
In a “speed walkthrough,” determine which combination of home page search interface (box vs. link) and search collection (catalog vs. website) works best.

METHOD
Do task-based walkthroughs of library home pages representing the different combinations of search box vs. search link, and catalog search vs. website search.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Library</th>
<th>Catalog search option</th>
<th>Web search option</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cornell</td>
<td>box</td>
<td>box</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yale</td>
<td>box</td>
<td>link</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U. Utah</td>
<td>link (catalog)</td>
<td>link</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duke</td>
<td>link</td>
<td>box</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UCLA</td>
<td>link (Find books, etc.)</td>
<td>link</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Tasks were taken from the NCSU Libraries User Roles page on the Wiki:
1. Have citation, how do I find the location (call number) of journal?
2. How do I find books on a particular subject?
3. How do I access the catalog?
4. How do I find a video/CD/tape?

We worked in pairs. Each pair looked at the four tasks for each of two home pages. Afterwards, results from each pair were consolidated into two sets ordered from most to least preferable.

FINDINGS
Set 1 (most to least preferable):
1. Cornell
2. U. Utah
3. Duke

Set 2:
1. Yale
2. UCLA

When asked about Yale vs. Cornell, the group expressed mixed opinions. One comment was that much depends on the quality of the site search and, if a box is used, where it is
placed on the home page. A similar comment was made about Duke's page, which has site search placed very prominently, and no search box for the catalog on the home page.\footnote{The Duke site incorporates catalog search into site search results, but catalog results are on the right and sometimes do not appear. For example, catalog results appear for “Soviet Union” but not “Russia.”}

Other comments:

- Cornell: Catalog is prominent, nice and big. Easier to read than Utah.
- Yale: Two mentions of catalogs (Orbis, other catalogs) is confusing.
- Utah: "Library catalog--What we own" is nice terminology. But two catalogs is confusing (Library catalog, Utah's catalog).
- Duke: For finding a citation, the label "Catalog" is not very meaningful. For finding a book, site search may be too attractive and the route to the catalog too indirect.
- UCLA: No search box on home page. Not clear where to look for things or what's going to happen when a pull-down option is followed. Three catalogs is confusing. For known-item search, you want a search box. When you don't find one, you have to stop and think.

CONCLUSIONS

Yale and Cornell emerged as the best designs in each set. Both have a catalog search box placed prominently near the top of the page.

Important considerations for site search: 1) quality of the site search implementation; and 2) if a site search box is on the home page, placement of the box: is it clearly differentiated from catalog search?