NCSU Libraries Web Survey:  
Final Report

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Table of contents

Executive Summary
Method
Results
Findings and recommendations

Appendix A: Survey Form
Appendix B: Summary of Findings and Recommendations
Executive Summary

A web survey linked from the NCSU Libraries Homepage was conducted in October and November of 2003. The survey asked whether users had been successful in their last visits and what they would like to see on the Libraries’ website. There were 127 participants with the majority (54%) being graduate students.

Students reported that they were most often looking for books, journal articles, or databases. The majority of the time (82%) they reported finding the resource they were looking for. Many feature requests centered on the catalog, journals, and databases.

A large number of comments (41%) indicated wants that already exist on the NCSU Libraries homepage. This may indicate a problem locating the services we have available or in our naming of these services. Frequently suggested features that already exist included online reference help from a librarian, My Borrowing Record functionality, and browsing journals by subject.

Recommendations for the catalog included adding more catalog search options on the homepage, providing research suggestions within the catalog, eliminating or extending catalog session time limits, and supporting marking records for review and printout. Regarding access to journal articles, some respondents suggested more browsing of journals and e-journals by subject. Many respondents wanted to remove infrequently used links from the homepage to reduce clutter. A more prominent library website search box and easier ways to browse course reserves were also mentioned. A full summary of findings and recommendations may be found in Appendix B.

Method

Survey Design

Survey data was collected during October and November 2003. Library users were asked to supply an email address and their university affiliation (faculty, staff, graduate student, undergraduate student, or other), answer two open-ended questions about their recent experiences with the library website and suggestions for improvement, and whether they were willing to be contacted in the future. The purpose of the open-ended questions was to get patrons’ ideas at the beginning of the web redesign process when the surveyors were not looking for anything in particular from their respondents.

The survey served in part as a recruiting tool for focus groups and upcoming usability tests. During October-November 2003, patrons visiting the NCSU Libraries homepage saw a prominent link to the survey page shown in Appendix A. As an incentive, a $25 cash prize was given to one survey respondent chosen at random.
Data Analysis

Question 1: Did you find what you were looking for?
The responses to the first question were divided by whether they answered yes or no. Some respondents answered yes to finding some things and no to finding others, so some have multiple yes’s and/or no’s. The responses were grouped in categories based on what they were looking for or doing at the Libraries’ website.

Question 2: When you visit a library website, what would you like to see?
The salient points about the library website were extracted from each response to the second question and also from the answer to the first question where users reported failure. These were then organized into 12 categories:

- Catalog
- Journals and Databases
- Research Assistance
- Borrowing
- Library Information
- Interlibrary Services
- Personalization
- Reserves
- Design
- Timely Content
- Navigation
- Other

From there, it was determined whether the suggestion already exists on the site. Sometimes this was straightforward; vague responses or comparative statements such as "easier" or "more" made this assessment challenging. In cases where users suggested features that already exists, some simply stated what they would like to see on a library homepage, regardless of the existing site (this is in line with the actual text of the question), and some did not realize such services are already offered.

Within each category, similar ideas were grouped into clusters. Recommendations were made around clusters with high counts (meaning many people independently suggested similar points) and also included some unique or interesting ideas that appeared less frequently.

Results

Respondent characteristics

There were 127 respondents, with graduate students representing 54% of the returns, undergraduates representing 35%, and the remainder divided among faculty, staff, and other. The pool of this survey does not represent the university as a whole. As shown in Figure 1, graduate students are overrepresented while undergraduates and faculty are underrepresented.
Question 1: Did you find what you were looking for?

In response to the question “During your last 3 visits to the NCSU Libraries’ website, did you find what you were looking for? Please comment,” an overwhelming positive response (82%) was reported. Table 1 summarizes the responses:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Count (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>99 (82%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>18 (15%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>4 (3%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 Positive and negative responses to Question 1

Overall, respondents came to the Libraries’ website to find books or journal articles, but they also often were looking for e-reserves and information on borrowing or renewing books. Table 2 shows categories of responses. Most negative responses were in attempting to use the catalog, online journals, and databases. Proportionally, users had the most difficulty locating journal articles and databases.
Table 2 Positive and negative responses by category

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Positive</th>
<th>Negative</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Journals and Databases</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catalog</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reserves</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Borrowing</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personalization</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Library Information</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Assistance</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Resources</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interlibrary Services</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LOBO</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>97</strong></td>
<td><strong>17</strong></td>
<td><strong>114</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Question 2: When you visit a library website, what would you like to see?

The results indicate that most things people wanted on a library website fell within the category of Journals and Databases and the Catalog. Table 3 shows the twelve categories and how many suggestions were made in each area:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Suggestions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Journals and Databases</td>
<td>49 (25%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catalog</td>
<td>39 (20%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Borrowing</td>
<td>23 (12%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Assistance</td>
<td>18 (9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interlibrary Services</td>
<td>12 (6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Library Information</td>
<td>11 (6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Design</td>
<td>9 (5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timely Content</td>
<td>9 (5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personalization</td>
<td>8 (4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reserves</td>
<td>7 (4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Navigation</td>
<td>6 (3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2 (1%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 Number of suggestions by category

A large number of respondents to the second question (41%) indicated wants that already exists on the NCSU Libraries homepage. Most frequently, users requested the ability to chat with a librarian live, to review their borrowing record, and to renew books. While some of these responses might be attributed to the wording of the question, the phrasing of some responses strongly suggests that the respondent was not aware the functionality already exists.

NCSU Libraries Web Survey
June 2004
Findings and Recommendations

Recommendations and findings reflect suggestions and failed requests that were independently reported by multiple users and a few particularly novel and worthy suggestions. While most suggestions related to journals and databases, there were more unique suggestions for the catalog.

Areas of findings and recommendations are:
1. Catalog
2. Borrowing
3. Research Assistance/Instruction
4. Design and Navigation
5. Interlibrary Services
6. Journals and Databases
7. Library information
8. Other

1. CATALOG

1.1. Add catalog search options on the library homepage (Call Number, ISBN, and others)

Currently, users may search in five search fields on the library homepage. Four users suggested adding additional catalog search fields. Two (1 grad, 1 other) requested additional numeric search fields such as call numbers and ISBNs. Two others (1 grad, 1 undergrad) suggested “full search functionality” on the homepage.

![Figure 2 Catalog search fields available on homepage](image)

![Figure 3 Catalog search fields available in advanced search](image)

It is possible that users don’t see the “other search options” link on the homepage. Consider adding catalog search options or making the link to the additional search options more prominent.
1.2. **Support marking records for review and printout for use in the stacks**
Two graduate students suggested that they would like to be able to mark records and view them in a printable list. This list should include item locations and availability within the library to facilitate retrieval when in the library. One suggested:

“Something like a shopping cart where I can add the books I’m interested in for future reference, and I can print the selected results in one page when I’m done searching.”

Duke University Libraries currently support a “select” feature in their catalog, as does JSTOR.

1.3. **Eliminate or extend catalog session timeouts**
Three users expressed annoyance and frustration at catalog session timeouts and redirects. These users did not understand why a catalog session times out or what the error messages mean. One undergraduate commented,

“Several times (more than 5), I have been doing an intensive search through the catalog only to receive a message that states my Web2 session has expired. I'm not sure exactly what this means, but it is incredibly irritating to have to start a search over from scratch.”

Currently, Web2 sessions time out after 10 minutes of inactivity. Users are redirected to the advanced search page without warning or an explanation. If it is not technically possible to eliminate timeouts, ensure that users are clearly aware of them and allow users to extend their sessions. OCLC’s WorldCat provides this functionality by displaying a backwards-counting clock in the status bar and a popup one minute before the timeout occurs:

![Figure 4 WorldCat status bar displays remaining time in session](image)

![Figure 5 WorldCat provides an option to extend session](image)

1.4. **Display best catalog match first**
Three graduate students mentioned frustration with the way catalog results are displayed. Two were confused by the fact that Web2 displays the best match for their search as the second item in the list. One student believed this was a
programming error. Another student suggested that a catalog search should display the most relevant results immediately, without the additional step of choosing between sometimes irrelevant options.

1.5. **Develop a hierarchical approach to subject browsing in the catalog**
Two graduate students suggested developing a hierarchical subject guide to materials in the catalog. Currently, the only approach to accessing the catalog relies on the search paradigm, which requires recall or knowledge of search vocabulary. Browsing interfaces, such as the Yahoo! Directory, may provide an alternative approach for those who do not already know the vocabulary for the subject they are researching. Users could begin with a short, broad list of subjects and navigate to specific L.C. Subject Headings.

1.6. **Make sorting catalog search results faster**
Two users complained about sort times, one saying it took over 15 minutes to sort his results.

1.7. **Display material locations in catalog (implemented)**
Four users suggested displaying book locations within catalog listings. This functionality was implemented since the survey was completed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Call Number</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Material Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>QA276.3 .T43 2001</td>
<td>D. H. Hill Library - Stacks (8th floor)</td>
<td>Book</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 6** Material location is now displayed in catalog

2. **BORROWING**

2.1. **Investigate ways to make “My Borrowing Record” more prominent**
Seven users mentioned that they would like to be able to check which books they have checked out, due dates, and options for renewal. Of these, at least 5 (2 undergrads, 3 grads) did not appear to understand that this functionality is already available.

2.2. **Consider adding the ability to reserve and recall books online**
Three users (1 faculty, 1 undergraduate, 1 other) suggested adding the ability to reserve books for pickup at the circulation desk, and four additional users (all graduate students) suggested adding an online tool to recall checked out books. A “request item” link, which brings users to information about TripSaver/TRLN, was added a few months before the survey.

2.3. **Suggest help in locating missing materials in the stacks**
Three users complained that they could not physically find materials they located in the online catalog. It is not clear if these users understood what
options they have available to them if this occurs, such as checking re-
sheeling locations or placing a materials search. Ensure that users know how
to request help in finding an item and consider adding functionality to request
a materials search online.

3. RESEARCH ASSISTANCE/INSTRUCTION

3.1. Provide research suggestions within the catalog
Four users (1 faculty, 3 undergraduates) suggested that the catalog should
offer additional research suggestions in the context of user searches. For
example, one undergraduate suggested that databases related to the subject of
a book could be displayed alongside its catalog entry. One faculty member
suggested an Amazon-like “people who checked out this book also checked
out...” feature that would data mine anonymous borrowing records and
suggest related books.

3.2. Provide citation help for books and journal articles
One undergraduate suggested adding a page with information about common
citation styles and linking to it from the homepage. Currently, this
information is available through the drop-down “HOW DO I?....” menu on the
homepage, but is not commonly accessed¹. The student did not appear to
know this option was available. He or she referred to the Duke University
Library homepage, where a link called “citing sources” provides extensive
information about citations, plagiarism, and style guides. Another approach
might be to build the citation-builder tool from LOBO into the catalog search
results.

3.3. Provide general-purpose tutorials about library research and database use
Although LOBO and other tutorials about library use are available, four users,
including 3 graduate students, suggested library and database use tutorials and
virtual tours of the library. This suggests that the information is not easily
found from the homepage.

Currently, this information is most directly accessed by selecting
“instruction,” and then choosing from one of three drop-down menus.

Ideas to consider: display database use tutorials within the context of the
database finder (as is done for ERIC); add a link to the virtual tour from the
homepage; and rename the “instruction” link to provide users with a better
understanding of the content it provides. Develop tutorials for commonly
used databases so users have a central and consistent repository for this
information.

3.4. Users are not aware of the Ask a Librarian feature

¹ See server log analysis presentation, March 2004
Six users suggested some sort of online chat service or email-based help. This functionality is already available in the aggressively marketed and branded “Ask a Librarian” feature of the site, yet at least four of the six respondents did not appear to be aware of it.

4. DESIGN AND NAVIGATION

4.1. **Drop infrequently used links from the homepage**

Four users (3 graduate, 1 staff) stated that the homepage, especially the left navigation menu, is too complicated. They found it “cluttered,” “jumbled,” and generally confusing. The homepage currently has a total of 47 (not including drop-down options).²

4.2. **Make library website search engine more prominent**

Two users mentioned the library website search engine. Site search functionality is currently difficult to find on the library’s homepage. It is displayed as a text link at the bottom of the crowded left navigation bar, requiring scrolling for many users. Consider adding a search box on the homepage, but ensure that it is visually distinct from the catalog search:

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Figure 7 Site search functionality is hidden on the homepage

Figure 8 Redesign makes search more visible

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5. INTERLIBRARY SERVICES

5.1. **Make alternate catalog searching more visible, include Wake County Public Libraries Catalog**

Six users mentioned that they would like the ability to search other catalogs, including those of the TLRN, CRC, and UNC systems, as well as the Wake County Public Library. Of these, at least four did not appear to understand that this functionality is already available, including one faculty member and several graduate students. Users also suggested that they would like to find links to local library homepages.

Currently, TLRN catalog searches (individual, not combined) are available only on the advanced search screen and within catalog results. To make this

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² Log analysis of homepage links from February 2004 data, shows that top 6 links on the homepage account for 84% of clicks, and the top 20 account for 96%.

NCSU Libraries Web Survey
June 2004
option more visible, consider changing the homepage search screen to display as follows:

![Find Books, Journals, and Other Materials in the Catalog](image)

Other search options (including other libraries).

Figure 9 Redesigned Homepage Catalog Search

5.2. **Provide online tracking of TripSaver/ILL requests and borrowing records**

Two students wanted to be able to track material requests from other libraries within their borrowing records. This includes the ability to viewed checked out ILL items.

6. **JOURNALS AND DATABASES**

6.1. **Support browsing of journals and e-journals by subject**

Several users mentioned that they would like easier access to available journals and databases. At least nine users mentioned difficulties finding appropriate journals or journal articles. Two users suggested adding the option to browse specific journals by subject, an option that already exists in the E-Journal finder but might not be prominent enough.

6.2. **Users like e-journals**

Many users commented that they find full-text online journals very useful. Six said that they would like to see additional full-text journals and date ranges available online.

7. **LIBRARY INFORMATION**

7.1. **Consider displaying library hours on the homepage**

Three users commented that they would like to see main library operating hours on the homepage. One graduate student commented that;

“It would be nice to have reminder of the library hours, especially when there are special hours during holidays, on the main page so that users would be reminded of them.”

Hours for the current day would be especially handy.

7.2. **Provide information about safety in the library**

One undergraduate student suggested including a link to safety information within the library, “especially for students studying late at night.” This information could include risks, crime statistics, help button/emergency phone locations, reporting information, safety tips, and information on safety services within the library.
8. OTHER

8.1. Develop easier ways to browse course reserves
Currently, course reserves are displayed in no discernible order and with no way to skip to a particular page of reserves. Three students (1 graduate, 2 undergraduates) commented that they would like this functionality improved. (Log analysis shows that course reserves are the second most frequently accessed link from the homepage, excluding catalog searches.) Some classes have over 150 reserve items, requiring students to browse through up to 15 pages of results before retrieving the appropriate document.

Possible improvements include:
- Directing searches to course reserve page immediately, instead of displaying similar instructor names or course numbers
- Ability to sort reserves by author, title, or possibly date added
- Option to limit display to e-reserves only
- Access to any page within the reserve list
- Searching within course reserves

8.2. Feature new books on homepage
Seven users suggested displaying new library acquisitions on the homepage, and several wanted them displayed by subject or research interest. Some users also suggested providing a list of recently arrived journals. One possible way to display this is to feature one or two interesting new books on the homepage, with cover art and a link to the books’ catalog entries. The material could rotate through a selection of recent acquisitions.
Appendix A: Survey Form

Help the Libraries design our website of the future

The NCSU Libraries is conducting a brief survey to determine your use of the Libraries' website in order to improve services. This survey is open to the North Carolina State University community (Libraries staff: Please do NOT participate). If you provide your email address, you will be entered into a drawing in December for a $25 cash prize.

Email: 
Affiliation: 

During your last 3 visits to the NCSU Libraries' website, did you find what you were looking for? Please comment.

When you visit a library website, what would you like to see? For example, what tools, options or services would you like to see? (To answer this question, you may use other library or non-library websites as examples.)

☐ The Libraries may contact me to participate in a future website usability study (this opportunity will include a small cash incentive).
Appendix B: Summary of Findings and Recommendations

1. **Catalog**
   1.1. Add catalog search options on the library homepage (Call Number, ISBN, and others)
   1.2. Support marking records for review and printout for use in the stacks
   1.3. Eliminate or extend catalog session timeouts
   1.4. Display best catalog match first
   1.5. Develop a hierarchical approach to subject browsing in the catalog
   1.6. Make sorting catalog search results faster
   1.7. Display material locations in catalog (implemented)

2. **Borrowing**
   2.1. Investigate ways to make “My Borrowing Record” more prominent
   2.2. Consider adding the ability to reserve and recall books online
   2.3. Suggest help in locating missing materials in the stacks

3. **Research Assistance/Instruction**
   3.1. Provide research suggestions within the catalog
   3.2. Provide citation help for books and journal articles
   3.3. Provide general-purpose tutorials about library research and database use
   3.4. Users are not aware of the Ask a Librarian feature

4. **Design and Navigation**
   4.1. Drop infrequently used links from the homepage
   4.2. Make library website search engine more prominent

5. **Interlibrary Services**
   5.1. Make alternate catalog searching more visible, include Wake County Public Libraries Catalog
   5.2. Provide online tracking of TripSaver/ILL requests and borrowing records

6. **Journals and Databases**
   6.1. Support browsing of journals and e-journals by subject
   6.2. Users like e-journals

7. **Library Information**
   7.1. Consider displaying library hours on the homepage
   7.2. Provide information about safety in the library

8. **Other**
   8.1. Develop easier ways to browse course reserves
   8.2. Feature new books on homepage