Student Guide - UX Cafe

UW Libraries ITSDS Usability Team | AU23
Sabrina Hsu & Sabrina Lin

Introduction

This project focused on evaluating the [UW Libraries student guide page](#), a guide whose purpose is to introduce resources that students may not know about. We assessed the guide's utility for students via "UX Cafe," pinpointing and resolving user-experience and interface issues to align it more closely with user expectations. UX Cafe is a research methodology that UW Libraries uses to get quick user feedback via drop-ins in exchange for sweet treats. This takes out the hassle of scheduling and extensive planning that usually comes with UX research, and allows us to obtain user feedback iteratively. From this feedback, we aimed to transform the student guide page into a more helpful resource that supports students throughout their academic journey.

Purpose

- Evaluate the need for the student guide page and its contents
- Understand how undergraduate and graduate students prioritize information on the student guide page
- Determine how to redesign the page to better fit student needs.

Research Methods & Process

Initially, participants were asked to interact with the existing student guide page, provide feedback on its content and layout, and perform a card-sorting task to identify the most and least helpful elements. This activity was aimed at understanding what students value most on the guide and adjusting the content and layout accordingly.

After synthesizing the results, we tested a redesigned version where participants performed a recall task, focusing on the ease of information retrieval and the visual appeal of the page. The sessions concluded with questions related to improvements, impression, confusion, and suggestions related to layout and content.

Following the end of the user testing sessions, the UX team gathered key stakeholders across the libraries, including subject librarians and the communications team, to discuss findings and next steps. This iterative and cross-functional feedback process was critical in refining the webpage to better meet the needs of current and prospective students and staff, ensuring that resources are accessible, helpful, and memorable.

Analysis and Findings

Throughout the card-sorting and recall activities, we collected substantial feedback on the university library's web page design, leading to several actionable insights.

Card-sorting activity with the original page:
- Text Density and Balance: In the original page, students found the page too text-heavy and visually unbalanced, advocating for increased use of graphics, colored backgrounds, and student-centered imagery to enhance engagement.
- Focus on Student Needs: Feedback indicated a need for the page to be more student-focused and less promotional, prioritizing student usage of the libraries
- Prioritization of Resources: Operational hours and study spaces were the top priorities for students, while book clubs were deemed less essential.

Recall activity with the redesigned page:
- White Space Usage: In the redesigned page, there was a consensus on the underutilization of white space, with suggestions to fill it with practical elements like a table of contents with hyperlinks to aid navigation.
- Visual Elements: Students best remembered visually distinct features (i.e., sections with pictures), but often forgot details at the bottom of the page

Discussions with stakeholders:
- Page Usage Data: The student guide is a popular and frequently-visited page.
- Questions from Students: Subject librarians often get questions from students that aren't the things that they need to read for classes, including leisure reading.
- Wording: Reword content on the guide to align more with user mental models.
- Visual Elements: Video modules and engaging visuals can be a good addition.
- Resources and Textbooks: These resources are the most frequently needed resources among students according to library staff.

Recommendations for Next Steps

Looking forward, we will focus on balancing both student and staff needs reflected in the UX Cafe and stakeholder discussions. The layout will retain the top banner for rotating important announcements and the project team will explore possibilities to introduce video modules and more engaging visuals like student-centered images and icons. We will work on leveraging white space, resizing widgets, emphasizing resources and textbooks, and rewording content to ensure key information is more memorable and understandable. Further steps will include choosing the most effective user research methods for version 2 of the redesigned student guide page, which may include A/B testing or another UX Cafe session.