PSU English Department Website Research Report

Executive Summary

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Portland State
Technical and Professional Writing

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Executive Summary

The Portland State University English Department is a vital, integral component of the university's discourse and scholarship in the liberal arts. One of the department's stated goals is to provide students with "the breadth of knowledge and the communication skills" to successfully enter the workforce or continue to graduate level scholarship. In support of that goal, the English Department's own website is a key technological means of communication whose purpose is to provide critical information and resources to prospective students, current students, staff, and faculty. However, the University's recent migration to a Drupal 8 website content management system has left some doubt as to whether the English Department's specific site is meeting the needs of its users.

At the request of Chloe Bobar, Academic and Program Coordinator of the Portland State University English Department, we conducted a usability study of the Department website. The purpose of the usability study was to gain a better understanding of the user experience in navigating the PSU English Department website and to identify any unmet user needs. This Top Line Report is a summary of our findings, key takeaways and recommendations. The information and data contained herein is a result of user research, surveys, interviews and usability testing.

In the following pages, problems within the design of the PSU English Department website interface are documented. These design issues have the potential to negatively impact the experience of new-to-university users, individuals with disabilities or who are otherwise impaired, students at both the graduate and undergraduate level, as well as those considering enrolling at Portland State Universityfor the first time. We recommend the following design issues within the interface pages of the PSU English Department website be addressed, including but not limited to **word choice and word usage**, **site navigability**, **information pathways**, as well as **site design and site layout**, to ensure that users get the best experience and that the widest group of visitors are able to access the information they need.

Introduction

Context

In the Summer of 2020, Portland State University (PSU) updated the entirety of their site, including department home and sub-pages. After becoming aware of navigability and content coherency issues with some English Department program pages, the PSU English Department requested research be conducted to see what issues users were experiencing with the site and to glean users' desired information in order to better understand and serve PSU English faculty, prospective students, current students, and alumni. This project aimed to use information gathered through surveys, usability tests, and interviews to inform the personas and scenarios that would later inform revisions to the department site(s).

The purpose of usability testing as a method was to collect data on the navigability of the PSU English Department website and the accessibility of information related to English Department programs, advising, and events. Users were asked to complete a number of tasks that were assessed against successful completion criteria and established benchmarks. We collected feedback from participants about their experience completing specific tasks with the website in order to discover the various uses for the department site and if there are any unmet accessibility needs, along with giving users the opportunity to describe their feelings or attitudes and the information they're seeking when using the department website.

Study Objectives

Our overall study objectives included the following goals:

1. Understand who the users of the PSU English Department website are.
1. Gain insight on the goals and motivations of PSU English Department website users.
2. Understand how users feel about the PSU English Department website.
3. Understand the accessibility needs of PSU English Department website users.

Our objectives for usability testing of the PSU English Department website included the following goals:

1. Evaluate the ease of navigation to various landing pages available on the PSU English Dept. website.
2. Evaluate the ease of navigation to specific English Department program information.
3. Describe the specific attitudes and feelings users have about their navigation experiences with the PSU English Department website.
4. Determine whether all types of users can meet the successful completion criteria.
5. Identify difficulties with navigability and accessibility as a result of website design.

Study Methods

This usability study was somewhat exploratory in nature but it worked to assess the navigability and effectiveness of the [Portland State University (PSU) English website](). Researchers recruited 34 usability testing participants to act as proxy users for testing the department site. Participants acted as proxies for the following four user groups: current English undergraduate students, current English graduate students, prospective English undergraduate students, and prospective English graduate students. We collected quantitative data about error and success rates as well as qualitative and quantitative data about participants' experiences using the site.

In our between-subjects study, each of the 34 participants attempted an individual task path. Class members conducted up to 34 individual 30 minute usability sessions. Each participant performed one task path using [www.pdx.edu/english](). 10 minutes of each session were used to explain the session to the participant, review background information, and to conduct a post-test debriefing interview. 20 minutes of the session was devoted to the actual usability test tasks. The testing exercises were conducted remotely (via Zoom) by two people—with one performing as moderator and the other as note taker. Observations and other data were recorded on a Google Form and via Zoom.

Each participant worked through a separate task path, as opposed to working though multiple task paths as in a within-subjects design. The 34 participants were divided into the following four task path groups based on their proxy user type. Group A acted as current English undergraduate students, Group B acted as current English graduate students, Group C acted as prospective undergraduate students, and group D acted as composed of prospective graduate students. Group A tested task path 1, Group B tested task path 2, Group C tested task path 3, and Group D tested task path 4, with each task path tested a total of 8 times. See Table 1 for reference.

Task Path 1	Task Path 2	Task Path 3	Task Path 4
Group A (prospective English undergraduate students)	Group B (prospective English graduate students)	Group C (current undergraduate students)	Group D (current graduate students)

Data was collected and generated using Google Forms in a survey format to get qualitative and quantitative data. Teams obtained findings by accessing a spreadsheet of this data to see patterns, trends, frequencies, issues, thoughts, etc. while usability testing was being conducted. After identifying patterns and frequencies, these findings were analyzed by each team to inform their goals, operations, and questions which can help support further research and usability testing, while also supporting our client, Chloe Bobar, in future site updates.

Findings

Objective 1: Evaluate the ease of navigation to various landing pages available on the PSU English Dept. website

Finding 1: More than half of participants found it difficult to navigate to career information for English majors.

Introduction

This task had the lowest success rate of the tasks, as well as the longest average task time, and widest time range with the longest attempt at 8 minutes. From the comments, participants had a difficult time finding the information both when starting from the home page, and navigating through other program pages. Participants did not find any clues for career information in the top drop down menus.

Supporting Data

Key Comments:

● "*Goes to bottom and clicks learn more, and careers. Is confused, not sure if he's in the right place, as it says careers at PSU. Not sure if this is for English specifically. Is frustrated that he can't find the information he is looking for. Went back to home page, went to the career information in the book publishing. Likes that it has this, but is confused that he can't find it under the other programs.*"
● "*Scrolls through homepage looking for something to indicate information about english careers. Goes down to the very bottom, sees career information, but it just brings him to careers at Portland State. Goes to top navigation and checks out each button. Doesn't find anything in the top navigation to indicate information about English majors.*"

*For Moderators: Was Task 1 successfully completed?

9 responses

● Yes
● No

55.6%

44.4%

Task	Avg time, minutes
English Undergrad	
A1. Scholarship deadline	1.96
A2. Office Hours	0.77
A3. Summer Courses	2.5
A4. Film Electives	1.68
English Graduate	
B1. MPTW Electives	1.8
B2. Graduate Funding	2.96
B3. Spring Courses	1.6
B4. Graduation Deadlines	0.92
Prospective Undergrad	
C1. Career Info	3.69
C2. BA + MA Pathway	1.5
C3. Event Registration	1.72
Prospective Graduate	
D1. MFA Director	1.46
D2. App Deadline	1.8
D3. Grad Assistantship	1.28

Finding 2: Both Undergraduate and Graduate participants easily found the list of courses being offered by the English department by using the top navigation bar.

Introduction

The success rate for both tasks involving finding a list of English department courses was 100% Both the participants in the Current English Undergraduate and Current English Graduate groups were able to easily find out which courses are being offered by the Department in Spring and Summer 2021. On average, participants in Group D completed this task in just 1.6 minutes. Most of them immediately went to the top navigation bar, clicked on Courses, and then selected the right term from the drop down menu. However, some of the participants first looked on the individual program pages or under 'Useful Links' before noticing the Course tab on the top navigation bar, which is why the average completion time for Group C is higher at 2.5 minutes.

Supporting Data

Key Comments:
- *"Now that was at the top of the screen, which was easy for me"*
- *"Being able to find info about the courses I want to take - very supportive."*
- *"Spring 2021 classes easy."*

- *"Immediately goes to courses - spring 2021 courses; then navigates to graduate english courses"*

Task	Avg time, minutes
English Undergrad	
A1. Scholarship deadline	1.96
A2. Office Hours	0.77
A3. Summer Courses	2.5
A4. Film Electives	1.68
English Graduate	
B1. MPTW Electives	1.8
B2. Graduate Funding	2.96
B3. Spring Courses	1.6
B4. Graduation Deadlines	0.92
Prospective Undergrad	
C1. Career Info	3.69
C2. BA + MA Pathway	1.5
C3. Event Registration	1.72
Prospective Graduate	
D1. MFA Director	1.46
D2. App Deadline	1.8
D3. Grad Assistantship	1.28

*For Moderators: Was Task 3 successfully completed?
8 responses

Yes
No
100%

*For Moderators: Was Task 3 successfully completed?
9 responses

Yes
No
100%
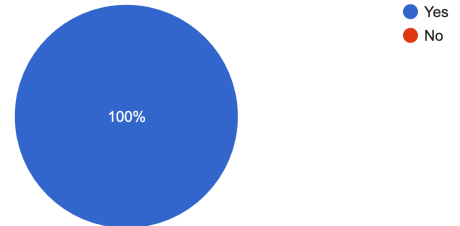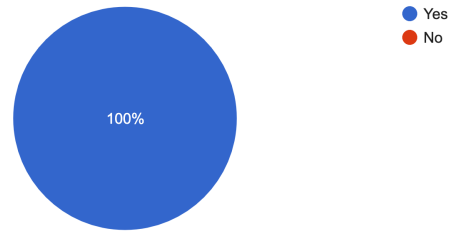
Finding 3: Comments from participants indicated difficulty accessing graduate school funding information.

Introduction

The majority of participants were able to successfully find funding options for graduate students. This task had a 62.5% successful completion rate. However, most comments from participants indicated this information was not easily accessible. The average time to complete this task was just under three minutes. There was a common theme among participants wishing the funding information was up in the top navigation for each program rather than down at the bottom of the home page of the English department website.

Supporting Data

Key Comments:

- *"Participant notes it's kind of strange there is nothing about funding up at the top of the website. They scroll down to the bottom and find awards and scholarships, decide to click that thinking it will explain different funding options. Participant then clicks on graduate. Participant notes they aren't sure they're in the right place since the is only information on scholarships and not FASFA or anything else."*
- *"Clicked on number awards and scholarships--Problem--Awards and scholarships are mixed--not clear which is for program funding. Cannot find graduate-student-funding page...went back to home page. Looking through navigation links, couldn't find the funding link."*
- *"Found it right away."*

Task	Avg time, minutes
English Undergrad	
A1. Scholarship deadline	1.96
A2. Office Hours	0.77
A3. Summer Courses	2.5
A4. Film Electives	1.68
English Graduate	
B1. MPTW Electives	1.8
B2. Graduate Funding	2.96
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B4. Graduation Deadlines	0.92
Prospective Undergrad	
C1. Career Info	3.69
C2. BA + MA Pathway	1.5
C3. Event Registration	1.72
Prospective Graduate	
D1. MFA Director	1.46
D2. App Deadline	1.8
D3. Grad Assistantship	1.28

Yes 62.5%
No 37.5%

Finding 4: Participants were successful finding contact information for English department faculty, through a variety of paths.

Introduction

Two tasks, one for prospective graduate students, and one for English undergraduates had 100% successful completion rates. Participants were all able to find faculty contact information. Comments mentioned a variety of ways that participants navigated through the website, some of which were quoted in the supporting data. There were multiple pages, and multiple clear

buttons to arrive at those pages, that accomplished the goal of these tasks, which may have been the factor that made this task easy to accomplish. Participants completed the tasks in a reasonable amount of time, compared to the averages from other tasks.

Supporting Data

1. Task 1 -Prospective Graduate student path to find faculty contact information.

   Key Comments:

   - *"User clicked on "Graduate" from the bar menu and then "MFA in Creative Writing" and "Faculty" and then scrolled down and found Leni Zumas picture and contact details."*
   - *"First thing is go to the graduate header link. Tried to use Tab to start without a mouse, couldn't do it. used mouse, drop down to faculty link. Command F, found a director of creative writing, but was more looking for 'MFA" and "Graduate". If the moderator had asked to make an advising appointment, I would've followed a different path."*
   - *"Participant started on the English Department page; scrolled down and clicked on the contact button, clicked on the creative writing link in the left side bar, scrolled down to the contact button, under the map clicked on faculty page, and found Leni Zumas on the full-time faculty listing page."*

2. Task 2 - English Undergrad task path to find faculty contact information.

   Key Comments:

   - *"Clicked contact at the top of the page and was routed to "contact English department", so went back to main page, found faculty directory at the bottom of the page eventually, after clicking the contact button on the very very top bar again."*

   - *"Starting from the home page - clicked on faculty - and found her contact info right away."*

*For Moderators: Was Task 1 successfully completed?
7 responses
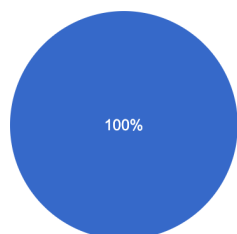
*For Moderators: Was Task 2 successfully completed?
9 responses

Task	Avg time, minutes
English Undergrad	
A1. Scholarship deadline	1.96
A2. Office Hours	0.77
A3. Summer Courses	2.5
A4. Film Electives	1.68
English Graduate	
B1. MPTW Electives	1.8
B2. Graduate Funding	2.96
B3. Spring Courses	1.6
B4. Graduation Deadlines	0.92
Prospective Undergrad	
C1. Career Info	3.69
C2. BA + MA Pathway	1.5
C3. Event Registration	1.72
Prospective Graduate	
D1. MFA Director	1.46
D2. App Deadline	1.8
D3. Grad Assistantship	1.28

Objective 2: Evaluate the ease of navigation to specific English Department program information

Finding 1: Many users utilized the navigation bar to find program information instead of scrolling through the English Department homepage.

Introduction

Usability test participants often used the navigation bar at the top of the English Department homepage to find specific English Department program information. When performing tasks focused on navigating to these specific programs, many participants preferred to look at the top navigation bar instead of scrolling through the English Department home page, and those who used the navigation bar were more successful at finding the information they needed. For example, participants tasked with finding MPTW elective courses were more likely to successfully and quickly find these electives when using the navigation bar, while those who scrolled through the English Department homepage were less likely to find this information. Participants who preferred to navigate through the English Department homepage text had a less obvious pathway to the desired information.

Supporting Data

1. <u>Task: Find course electives for the Master's in Professional & Tech Writing Program</u>
   Users who reported using the navigation bar to complete this task spent an average of **67.5 seconds** to find the desired information. Users who did not use the navigation bar spent an average of **195 seconds (or 3.25 minutes)** to look for information. These users are highlighted in red in the below table.

   Out of 8 total participants for this task, only **1 did NOT successfully complete the task – this participant did not use the navigation bar**. Out of the 6 participants that did use the navigation bar, 5 successfully completed the task in 1 minute or less.
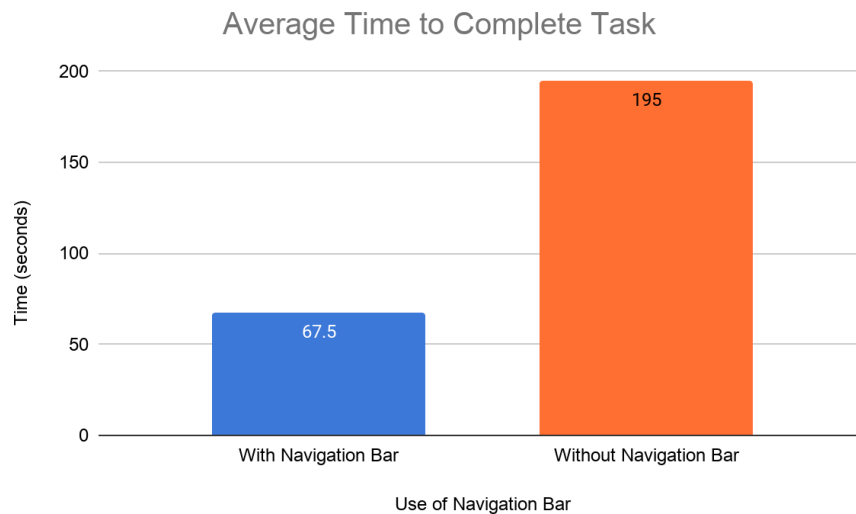
Average Time to Complete Task

User #	Did they use the navigation bar?	Did they complete the task?	How much time did they take?
User 1	No	No	5 minutes
User 2	Yes	Yes	15-30 seconds
User 3	Yes	Yes	15 seconds
User 4	Yes	Yes	4 minutes
User 5	No	Yes	1 minute 30 seconds
User 6	Yes	Yes	30 seconds
User 7	Yes	Yes	Less than 1 minute
User 8	Yes	Yes	1 minute

Key Comments:

- *"Found it very quickly."*
- *"Participant is scrolling down because there isn't any navigation at the top. Participant clicks on Courses because she assumes that's where elective info would be. Participant wants to click "register" button assuming this would lead to more info on courses tailored for her program. At this point the registration page*

comes up and participant voices feeling overwhelmed and unable to locate specific degree elective info."

- *"Participant clicks on courses at top because they felt course information would be under there. Did not see anything about a specific program. Participant then clicks on Graduate and sees the MTPW program, clicks curriculum because they think that might have more information. They then click on the "technical writing electives" link."*

2. <u>Task: Find course electives for English Undergraduate Degree in Film Studies</u>
Users who reported using the navigation bar to complete this task spent an average of **48.3 seconds** to find the desired information. Users who did not use the navigation bar spent an average of **178.3 seconds (or 2.97 minutes)** to look for information. These users are highlighted in red in the below table.

Out of 9 total participants for this task, only **1 did NOT successfully complete the task – this participant did not use the navigation bar**. All 6 participants who used the navigation bar for this task completed the task in 1 minute or less.

Key Comments:

- *"Hovers over Courses in the top nav, then backs out when she can't see anything with the drop down menu. Clicks 'Undergraduate' on top nav, then clicks on 'requirements' under 'film studies minor'"*
- *"Now made aware of the top nav, they clicked 'undergraduate' and got the drop down menu. Clicked 'requirements' under film studies minor"*
- *"Perused through "I am a" button, but didn't click anything. Scrolled down to bottom of page but didn't find anything to click on, clicked on english minor requirements from undergrad drop down list. Tried to use the search bar, but was asked not to. Ended up going to request info page. Said he was at a loss to find it, then clicked minor english requirements, then degree curriculum. Really wants to use search. 'So if it's in minor it should be in course descriptions.' Clicked browse course sections and was routed to banweb. 'I give up.'"*
- *"Undergraduate header- film studies minor. Went to film studies main heading (avoided requirements because looking for electives…) scrolling down looking for electives – and found."*

3. <u>Other key comments about the navigation bar (across all usability testing tasks):</u>
   - *"Looks through the top navigation bar to see if anything stands out as career information."*
   - *"Found it quickly in the navigation bar."*

- "*The menus at top page more intuitive in how eyes scan when looking at web page.*"
- "*Immediately looking at graduate tab at the top of the homepage.*"
- "*Hesitated at the top of the page for a while, skipped over the top navigation and started reading all of the sections under it.*"
- "*The top bar (horizontal) orientation is natural for my eyes when orienting on a webpage. I like the drop-down menu that appears after clicking on a section.*"
- "*The top black bar of the website is easy for her to notice and she would like more of the website to be styled like tha*t."

User #	Did they use the navigation bar?	Did they complete the task?	How much time did they take?
User 1	Yes	Yes	38 seconds
User 2	Yes	Yes	1 minute
User 3	No	Yes	3 minutes
User 4	Yes	Yes	1 minute
User 5	Yes	Yes	1 minute
User 6	Yes	Yes	12 seconds
User 7	Yes	Yes	1 minute
User 8	No	Yes	1 minute 10 seconds
User 9	No	No	4 minutes 45 seconds

Average Time to Complete Task

48.3 — With Navigation Bar
178.3 — Without Navigation Bar

Time (seconds)

Use of Navigation Bar
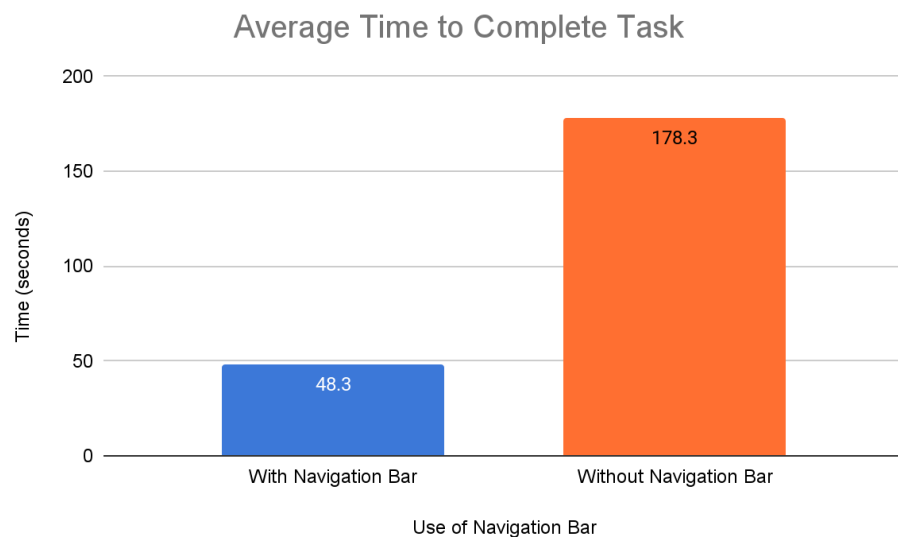
Finding 2: Users struggled to navigate to program-specific course descriptions and found them difficult to understand.

Introduction
Four tasks focused on finding course information and analyzing how informative and clear course descriptions seemed to usability testers. Of these tasks, the majority were successfully completed by testers. Times to complete these tasks ranged from ten seconds up to five minutes.

Electives were moderately easy to find on the department site, but elective course descriptions lacked detail. Testers struggled to find course descriptions and to differentiate between course sections. Those that clicked on "course sections" to explore what information on courses was available were routed to Banweb and/or the Registration Hub, both of which are inaccessible to those not enrolled at Portland State.

Supporting Data

Key Comments:

Find Summer 2021 Undergraduate Writing Courses Task
- "*[I'm] confused by [course sections] - are they one class or two?*"
- "*Now that was at the top of the screen, which was easy for me.*"

Find Film Studies Minor Electives Task
- "*So if it's [a] minor, it should be in course descriptions... I give up.*"

Find MTPW Electives Task
- "*Found it easily.*"
- "*I feel overwhelmed [when unable to locate specific elective info after being directed to Banweb by the Register button].*"

Find Spring 2021 Graduate-Level English Course Descriptions Task
- "*There are way more graduate programs than there are links there - how would I know which one to click?*"
- "*Only a showcased class description was found [when searching for ENG Dept Spring 2021 course descriptions].*"

Testers and Their Success in Finding Desired Information

Legend:
- Number of Testers
- Successful in Finding Course Descriptions/Information
- Unsuccessful in Finding Course Descriptions/Information

Desired Information	Number of Testers	Successful	Unsuccessful
Undergraduate Writing Courses Offered Summer 2021	9	9	0
Film Studies Minor, Electives	9	8	1
MTPW, Electives	8	7	1
Graduate English, Spring 2021 Course Descriptions	8	8	0

Y-axis: Number of Testers
X-axis: Desired Information

Length of Time to Complete Task

Legend:
- Shortest Length of Time to Find Course Descriptions/Information
- Longest Length of Time to Find Course Descriptions/Information

Program/Course Information to Find	Shortest	Longest
Undergraduate Writing Courses Offered Summer 2021	10	300
Film Studies Minor, Electives	12	285
MTPW, Electives	15	240
Graduate English, Spring 2021 Course Descriptions	3	120

Y-axis: Seconds
X-axis: Program/Course Information to Find

Finding 3: Site is lacking a breadcrumb trail or a way to get back to the English Department homepage.

Introduction
This finding demonstrates a navigational issue that affects larger accessibility of the site. A "bread crumb" trail is a secondary navigational tool that shows the user their location within the website and allows them to quickly return to a page visited prior, without having to return to the homepage or use the browser arrows. The addition of this enables a sense of accessibility to the user on a website described by testing participants as "confusing" and "not very straightforward". Suggestions provided by testing participants demonstrated a user desire for additional navigational tools, especially with participants who navigated mainly through scrolling, rather than a search bar or navigation drop down menu. Similar to a bread crumb trail, a return to home button was also discussed as a user feature to aid in navigation and accessibility.

Supporting Data

Key Comments:

- "*But the layout is confusing, and not very straightforward.*"
- "*There is no easy way to recover from making a mistake. On each page there should be a way to return to the PSU English Department page as well as other English department program main pages.*"
- "*The last task especially, there was a lot of bouncing around.*"
- *Finding the summer classes wasn't very intuitive and it was jarring to be rerouted to the homepage.*"
- "*Go to top of page" would be helpful so scrolling back up to the top of the page wouldn't be needed and would save time.*"
- "*If you were actually on the Creative Writing program page, the deadline information was easy to find. But if your starting place was someplace else you would have to hunt for it.*"
- "*Participants thought there were a lot of options to click and it was hard to navigate to the correct location.*"
- "*Participant is scrolling down because there isn't any navigation at the top". Participant clicks on Courses because she assumes that's where elective info would be. Participant wants to click "register" button assuming this would lead to more info on courses tailored for her program. At this point the registration page comes up and participant voices feeling overwhelmed and unable to locate specific degree elective info*". (Task Path 4, Group D)
- "*A big complaint is that after leaving the English Department's main page, it is not immediately clear how to get back to it*". (Task Path 2, Group B)

Finding 4: English department and program page layouts and pathways to access program-specific information have inconsistencies.

Introduction

Seven tasks focused on finding program-specific information, including application deadlines, graduation deadlines, and degree- and program-specific electives. Of these tasks, the majority were successfully completed by testers. Times to complete these tasks ranged from five seconds up to five minutes.

As the supporting data shows, this is a common hurdle testers encountered while completing program-specific tasks. Inconsistencies between program pages in terms of layout, design, and button/link locations seemed to affect how easy it was for participants to explore, find, and glean information from these pages and move from subpage back to home page. For example, the curriculum pages for other Master's programs compared to the Book Publishing Master's program are vastly different in not only design, but layout, information presentation, and language used.

Supporting Data

Key Comments from Participants:

- "*[I like] the design of the website, [it] looks clean, but the layout is confusing and not very straightforward.*"
- "*[I suggest] checking out… their link pathways and [developing] a better system of links. Have more direct pathways.*"
- "*From the front page under 'Undergraduate Studies' there should be direct links to each program page.*"
- "*It is odd that the 'Undergraduate Studies' at the bottom of the main page does not have individual [program] links.*"
- "*Avoid having multiple links going to the same place, especially in one sentence.*"
- "*What confused me was the mismatch between having four grad programs but having only two links - English and Writing courses.*"
- "*If you were actually on the Creative Writing program page, the deadline information was easy to find. But if your starting place was someplace else you would have to hunt for it.*"
- "*For me... 'contact' is not specific enough… [The contact button] is in tiny, tiny print, and it doesn't tell you why you would want to contact them. 'Questions' is too vague. It says questions, but it doesn't tell you what kinds of questions. Is it questions about admissions? It would have to be something that more explicitly says, if you have questions about our admissions process or set up an appointment with the advisor or*

transferring, go here.... I [need to] know exactly [where and] why I need to go, because this is not explicit enough, to me, at least. Transferring, go here. Recurrent student, go here. This process was not explicit enough."

Moderator notes on participant's responses to the following task - How well do you feel the website supported tasks:
- *"[Participant] feels there was never really a flat pathway to get to what they needed."*
- *"[Participant] thinks it needs improvement in terms of consistency, such as with book publishing having a career section in navigation bar, but not in the other programs. Make it so that there are more direct links in the navigation--have a more direct pathway to where they needs to go."*
- *"Participant thinks there were a lot of options to click and it was hard to navigate to the correct location."*
- *"Some tasks were very easy to accomplish and the website did a great job, other tasks were confusing in terms of layout and expected interactions."*
- *"There is no easy way to recover from making a mistake. On each page there should be a way to return to the PSU English Department page as well as other English department program main pages."*
- *"User felt that following the tasks in the order given was pretty easy but wasn't sure they could have found everything if they started from the PSU main page. There are a lot of layers to the link, and you have to scroll down a lot to find out what you want."*
- *"Could tell there were multiple pathways to find the same information, which can be helpful since not everyone's brain works the same."*
- *The stuff wasn't too hard to find but it seems there are a lot of options that could lead you to other places even though they would make sense to click.*

Moderator notes on participant's responses to the following task - Locate a page with information about the Bachelor's + Master's English Pathway program":
- *"Went back to undergraduate studies carousel and clicked on B+M in English Pathway. Was frustrated that there weren't links directly to the program pages from the homepage."*

Moderator notes on participant's responses to the following task - Pretend you are trying to make an advising/informational meeting before applying to the MFA Creative Writing program. Find the contact information for the program director:
- "*When they clicked on "Creative Writing", they noticed the button links on the Creative Writing page are not in the same order as those on the English Department page. It should be more consistent. From the Creative Writing page there was no way to easily return to the English Department page. The sidebar list of other English programs does not appear to the left of the 'giant' map. These types of features are inconsistently applied.*"

Inconsistencies within Masters program pages:

Inconsistencies were found between the Masters program pages, specifically when viewing the Masters in Book Publishing program pages and comparing them to the entirety of the other Masters programs under the English Department. Inconsistencies included layout, language used within textual content, design, and how information was organized/presented:
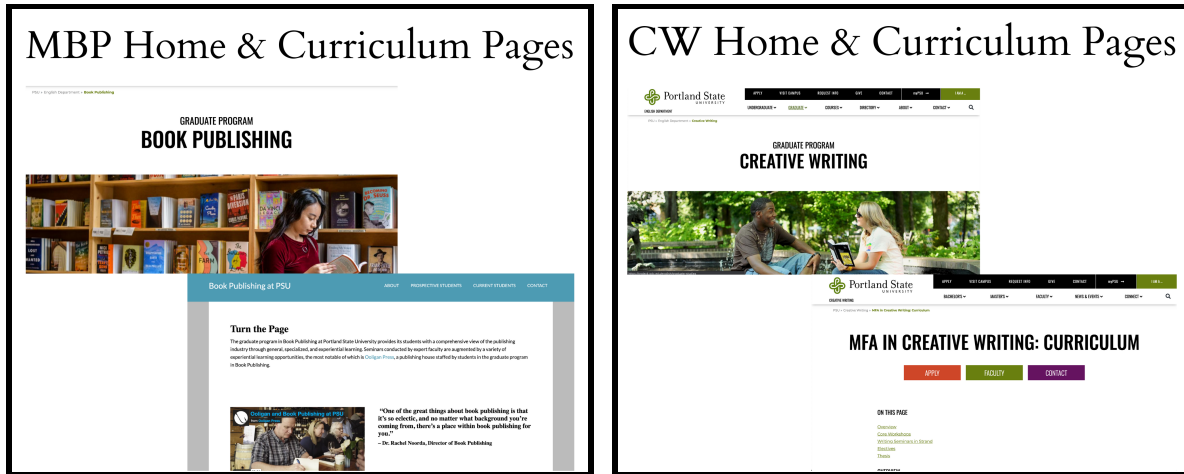
Finding 5: Users appreciated the multiple pathways to get to information, but found these pathways could be more direct and defined.

Introduction

Usability testing participants took multiple different paths to complete tasks on the English department website. Testing participants found this both to be helpful and detractive from their experience with the site. Some testing participants found the open-ended pathways to be confusing and potentially drew users to a part of the site they weren't looking for. One testing participant noted they would use an alternative path to a goal than the one described by the moderator. These participants advocated for a more direct and controlled user experience rather than subjectively searching for content. Other participants found multiple pathways "helpful" across task assignments and thought the design of this was potentially more accessible as "not everyone's brain is the same" and different users may have a diversity of ideas in how to reach content and complete task goals.

Supporting Data

Key Comments:

- "*I like that you can end up in the same location via two different links. That's helpful*."
- "*Could tell there were multiple pathways to find the same information, which can be helpful since not everyone's brain works the same.*"
- "*Feels there was never really a flat pathway to get to what he needed.*"
- "*If the moderator had asked to make an advising appointment, I would've followed a different path.*"
- "*The stuff wasn't too hard to find but it seems there are a lot of options that could lead you other places even though they would make sense to click.*"

User #	Does the user feel the website supports finding information for assigned tasks?	Comments
User 1	N	"there was never really a flat pathway to get to what he needed"
User 2	Y	"Fairly well"
User 3	Y	"Pretty good, but not excellent""
User 4	Y	"feels he was able to find most things he was required to find" "Make it so that there are more direct links in the navigation--have a more direct pathway to where he needs to go"
User 5	Y	"Somewhat well"
User 6	N	"Some tasks were very easy to accomplish and the website did a great job, other tasks were confusing in terms of layout and expected interactions"
User 7	Y	"Better than other sites I've used."
User 8	Y	"Very well"
User 9	Y	"Pretty well"
User 10	Y	Discussed with Moderator
User 11	N	"There is no easy way to recover from making a mistake. On each page there should be a way to return to the PSU English

		Department page as well as other English department program main pages."
User 12	Y	"User felt that following the tasks in the order given was pretty easy but wasn't sure they could have found everything if they started from the PSU main page"
User 13	N	"The last task especially was a lot of bouncing around. If I had known more context about english studies may have been easier"
User 14	Y	"Fairly well"
User 15	N	"Would like to see the drop down menus bigger, or in a box. It's easy for her to skim over text"
User 16	N	"The Scholarship's page did not support it very well at all. Frustrating."
User 17	N	"Participant thought there were a lot of options to click and it was hard to navigate to the correct location."
User 18	Y	"They did a good job of not saturating the page with information. I like that you can end up in thesame location via two different links. That's helpful."
User 19	Y	"The stuff wasn't too hard to find but it seems there are a lot of options that could lead you other places even though they would make sense to click"
User 20	N	"without a search function I think the website is about a 2 on that same scale. Without being able to use the search function the website is really hard to navigate"

Objective 3: Describe the specific attitudes and feelings users have about their navigation experiences with the PSU English Department website

Finding 1: The aesthetics and layout of the English Department homepage elicits an emotional response in approximately half of participants.

Introduction

Our data shows that approximately half of test participants had an overall positive first impression of the aesthetics of the site, with some users expressing specific features that they liked or disliked on the website.

At the beginning of our usability test we asked our participants to share their thoughts on the English Department website homepage with us before beginning any tasks. Emotions can be difficult to quantify, so to speak to this type of data we flagged words such as "like," "love," and "nice" to express positive emotions, associations, and attitudes towards the site, while words such as "confusing," or "distracting" denoted negative emotions, associations, or attitudes towards the site. For those who did not express such indicators, we considered their response to be neutral.

Supporting Data

Key Comments:

Approximately ⅓ of test participants (11 of 34) responded positively with the image of Portland's Skyline and view of Mt. Hood on the homepage of the English Department website.
"I like the image, it's a view of Portland. [...] It's grounding for feeling at home - which is nice."
"Love the image of Mt Hood"

Some test participants (3 of 34) found the image dissatisfactory in some way.
"The landing photo is dull. There are so many better photos of Mt. Hood. Why this one?"
"The picture of Portland's skyline is a little distracting, but pleasant nonetheless."

Some participants reported positive emotions about the readability of the site.
"It's very readable, so the formatting is set up so that it's easy to read for several stakeholders; meaning, people who may have a hard time reading small print -- it's set up with simplicity -- it's set up to be able to navigate easily. Actually, I just have to say that it's pretty easy to read."

The layout of the English department website sparked confusion and surprise amongst some.
"most websites will have the faculty, contact, and give information at the bottom, not at the top. Kind of confusing and throws you off to see this information at the top rather than other information."

The layout of the English Department website was pleasing to some participants.
"…very easy to see information, simplistic. Most websites will have the faculty, contact, and give information at the bottom, not at the top…"
"Looking at this, it's the English Dept. website for PSU. Thinks it's aesthetically pleasing, clean layout, likes the font—easy to read for anyone who's older."
"Clearly, this is the English Department. It jumps out at me."

Finding 2: Users became frustrated when they thought the English Department homepage didn't feature the studies and coursework prominently enough.

Introduction
The information users thought would be most relevant, courses and studies requires scrolling to the bottom of the homepage.

Supporting Data

Key Comments:

- "...takes a little while to get to good stuff...good stuff equals coursework."
- "Useful Links" are way down the bottom of the page, so not all that useful. I shouldn't have to scroll so much.
- "The website makes you scroll through a lot of things before getting to the more useful information, mostly the "explore the department' table of contents. People are looking for information, not to lounge and browse."
- "...surprised that info to sign up for classes is at the bottom- "explore the department.""
- "...the "explore the department section" feels like it would be better further up the page..."
- "Noticed the "useful links" were at the bottom, confused as to why they weren't at the top if they were important."
- "...seems a little strange to have useful links that far down."

Finding 3: Many participants were not able to locate the career information for English majors and when this happened they often expressed negative feelings.

Introduction

While the majority of tasks that we asked test participants to complete were completed successfully, some were not. When users are not able to find the information that they need they often expressed that they felt frustrated, and overwhelmed, indicating that not being able to find the information they need has a negative impact on their emotional state.

For example, the career information for undergraduate English Majors is difficult to find. Participants, acting as English undergraduates, were asked to navigate to career information for English Majors with a starting point of the homepage. We requested that they did not use the search bar.

Supporting Data

Table 1 This chart shows English undergraduates proxy users' success rate in navigating to career information for English Majors with a starting point of the homepage (Group A Task 1).
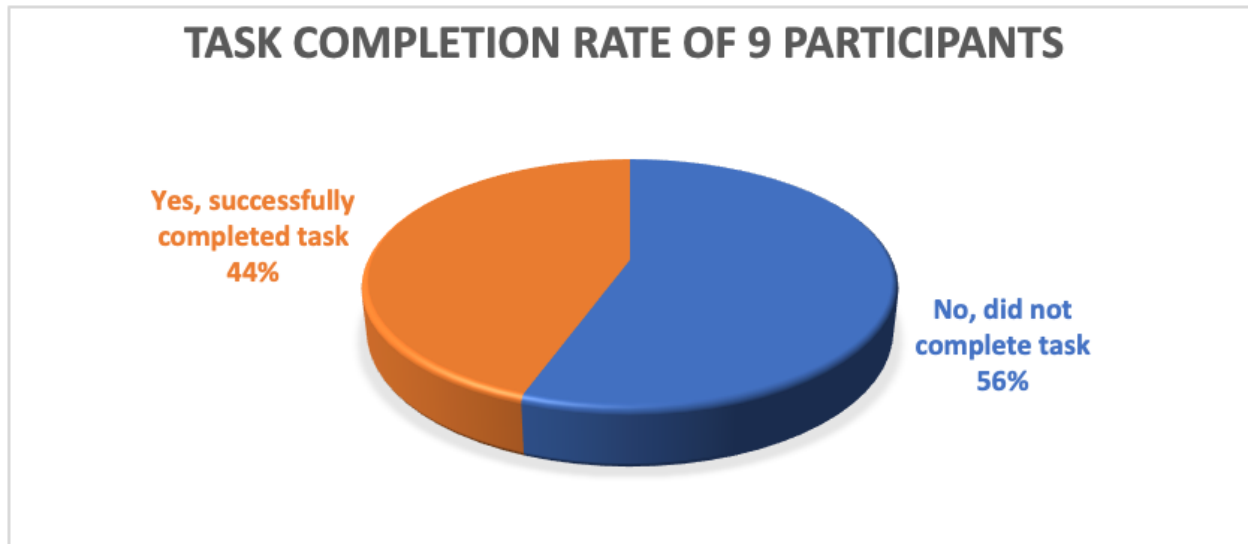
Key Comments:

- "[it's] a little frustrating to see that the dates are not updated."
- "At this point the registration page comes up and participant voices feeling overwhelmed and unable to locate specific degree elective info."
- "[The participant is] confused by three color navigation buttons at top of the Curriculum page."
- "Ok, maybe actually Courses--Then click Spring 2021--Then look at Graduate English or Graduate Writing courses? So, the ENG courses are literature...so I would go to Graduate Writing? So, there are way more graduate programs than there are links there...how would I know which one to click?"

Finding 4: As demonstrated by the high incompletion rate of the "finding careers information for English majors" task, many users got too overwhelmed and were not able to complete their task.

Introduction

During our usability testing there were some tasks that users eventually gave up on trying to complete. The task with the highest incompletion rates was Group A Task 1, referenced in Table 1, which asked participants, acting as English undergraduates, to navigate to career information for English Majors with a starting point of the homepage. We requested that they did not use the

search bar. The amount of time spent on this task ranged from 1 minute and 45 seconds to 7 minutes before giving up, or being asked to move on by the moderator. Notes from the testing sessions show that the participants were highly confused and potentially discouraged by these tasks.

Supporting Data

Key Comments:

- "[Participant] is confused that there is career information in the book publishing tab in the navigation bar, but not under the other programs. Goes to undergraduate studies, scrolls through page. Goes to bottom and clicks learn more, and careers. Is confused, not sure if he's in the right place, as it says careers at PSU. Not sure if this is for English specifically. Is frustrated that he can't find the information he is looking for. Went back to home page, went to the career information in the book publishing. Likes that it has this, but is confused that he can't find it under the other programs."
- [Participant] cannot find link regarding careers immediately ("Why an English degree?" is missing) Looks under "Undergraduate" dropdown, cannot find anything, Looks under "About" Looks under "Directory" Looks under "Apply"
- [Participant] scrolled down and clicked on undergraduate studies. Then clicked on English major/minor. Scrolled down to What can i do with a bachelor's degree or minor in English. Didn't like that it was near the bottom of the page. Didn't see the Careers button until it was pointed out.

Finding 5: Participants felt fairly successful in navigating the English Department website.

Introduction
After participants completed one of four task paths, they were asked to rate how successful they thought they were at completing the tasks on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being not at all successful and 5 being very successful.

Supporting Data

Table 2 Participants self-rate their success rate after attempting to navigate various task paths starting on the English Department homepage (1 being not at all successful and 5 being very successful)

Finding 6: It was challenging for many participants to find information on summer course offerings when navigating from the English Department homepage.

Introduction

Participants were tasked with navigating from the English Department homepage to find 2021 Summer Course offerings. They were told not to use the search bar. There was a broad range in times or task completion, from 10 seconds to 5 minutes.
that were being offered in Summer 2021.

Table 3 How many minutes it took for participants to navigate to undergraduate writing courses
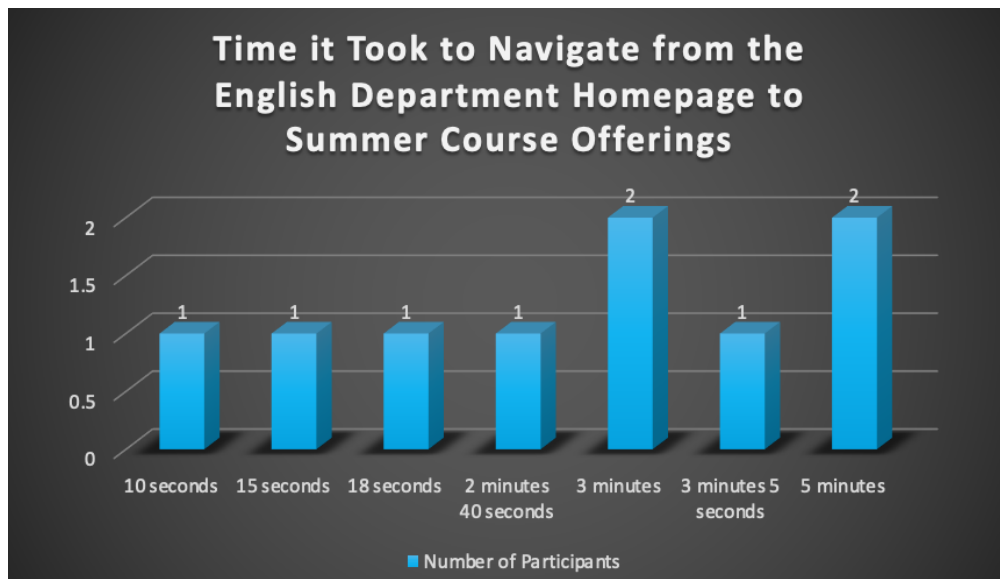
Key Comments:

- "Finding the summer classes wasn't very intuitive and it was jarring to be rerouted to the homepage."

Finding 7: Information about applying for scholarships is difficult to find. Frustration ensued, with users taking considerable time to accomplish the task as a result.

Introduction

The information necessary for English undergraduate students interested in applying for scholarships is difficult to find in a reasonable amount of time. Multiple users revealed having problems with having to retrace their steps by going back through previously visited pages to find whether they missed something. In fact, every single user save one had difficulty performing this task path. There were constant questions and hesitancy about preceding as well. More than half the users took at least two minutes to perform this task with two taking over five minutes. This led to frustration on the part of users, impacting their task performance.

Supporting Data

Table 4 This chart shows the user time spent searching for undergraduate scholarship information, with a significant portion of participants having difficulty accomplishing the task in less than 2 minutes.

Key Comments:

- "I WANT to click on the scholarships—but they aren't live links."
- "First going to undergraduate link – nothing there about scholarships. Looking for a link or heading that says scholarships. Took some searching – not as intuitive as I thought."
- "I'm not seeing anything that looks related that in the first top half of the screen."
- "[It's] A little frustrating to see that the dates aren't updated."

Finding 8: Prospective graduate students had difficulty finding information about graduate student funding options.

Introduction

Users found it challenging and frustrating to find information about how to pay for their programs. 37.5% of users could not find a link about funding options. Users commented on the fact that there isn't a link to anything related to finances on the home page (no headings or drop-down menus). One user found financial aid information, but the awards and scholarships were mixed. The user was not sure which is for program funding.

Supporting Data

Table 5 This chart shows the user success rates of finding information about graduate funding options for prospective graduate students.

USERS SUCCESS AT FINDING INFORMATION ABOUT GRADUATE FUNDING OPTIONS

No Success 37%

Found info 63%

Key Comments:

- "[Participant] notes they aren't sure they're in the right place since the[re] is only information on scholarships and not FASFA or anything else."
- "[Participant] notes it's kind of strange there is nothing about funding up at the top of the website."
- "[She] left the department [Redirected] to department-clicked on number awards and scholarships--[Problem]--Awards and scholarships are mixed--not clear which is for program funding. Cannot find graduate-student-funding page...went back to home page."

Objective 4: Determine whether all types of users can meet the successful completion criteria

Finding 1: Every type of user fulfilled the majority of their tasks.

Introduction

Each user group represents prospective English Undergraduate students, prospective English Graduate students, current English Undergraduate students, and current English Graduate students respectively. In every group, the majority of the users completed their overall task paths under four minutes. By this metric, all types of users were successful on average.

Supporting Data

Group	Task completion	Average completion time
A: Prospective English Undergraduates	Task 1: completed by 44.4% of users Task 2: completed by 100% of users Task 3: completed by 100% of users	Task 1: 3.7 minutes Task 2: 1.4 minutes Task 3: 1.6 minutes
B: Prospective English Graduates	Task 1: completed by 100% of users Task 2: completed by 100% of users Task 3: completed by 100% of users	Task 1: 1.3 minutes Task 2: 1.4 minutes Task 3: 1.3 minutes
C: Current English Undergraduates	Task 1: completed by 100% of users Task 2: completed by 100% of users Task 3: completed by 100% of users Task 4: completed by 88.9% of users	Task 1: 2.3 minutes Task 2: 40 seconds Task 3: 2.5 minutes Task 4: 1.3 minutes
D: Current English Graduates	Task 1: completed by 87.5% of users Task 2: completed by 62.5% of users Task 3: completed by 100% of users Task 4: completed by 100% of users	Task 1: 1.7 minutes Task 2: 2.8 minutes Task 3: 1.4 minutes Task 4: 49 seconds

Finding 2: English Undergraduates could not successfully locate accurate scholarship deadlines.

Introduction

Given the task of finding a list of scholarships and awards that are available for English undergraduate students, the average user navigated to the scholarships and awards page in 2.3 minutes. However, once on the page, 44% of users gave feedback that they were unable to find the deadlines of several scholarships on that page. This is because only a couple scholarships had their deadlines listed and bolded, so users assumed they needed to go further into the site to find the undisclosed deadlines.

Supporting Data

Key Comments:

- *"The deadlines are in the overview section, not in the list of scholarships itself, so the participant had to go back."* -- Moderator quote

- *"'[I'm] not really seeing deadlines clearly. The only deadlines I saw were bolded at the top. Still uncertain.'"* -- User quote

- *"'I can see the eligibility - but not the submission dates... If I scroll back up to overview - then I... see the submission dates - which has already passed. So that's not helpful. It's a little frustrating to see that the dates are not updated.'"* -- User quote

- *"'I'm seeing the types of scholarship but I'm not seeing the deadlines'"* -- User quote

Group	Task	Source of error	Average completion time
C	Task 1: Find a list of scholarships and awards that are available for English undergraduate students and the deadline for submissions.	Nothing under the Undergraduate top navigation pertaining to scholarships – this was a pain point for 3 participants After navigating to the scholarships and awards page, 4 participants still had trouble regarding the deadlines	2.3 minutes

Finding 3: The majority of prospective English Undergraduates could not navigate to Career Information.

Introduction

Of every user group, the only demographic to fail to complete a task as a majority were the English undergraduate students. The task of navigating to the page on career information took the longest to complete of every task in our useability study. This is an outlier, given that this demographic was able to navigate through their other three tasks with a timely accuracy congruent with the other groups.

Supporting Data

The average time it took to navigate to career information for English majors was 3.7 minutes, with one user giving up after 7 minutes of struggling. 55.6% of users did not manage to find the page.

Key Comments:

● "*The user is confused that there is career information in the book publishing tab in the navigation bar, but not under the other programs. [Having found the career page,] the user is not sure if the career page is for English specifically, or PSU students in general. The user notes his frustration that he can't find the information he is looking for.*" -- Moderator comment

*For Moderators: Was Task 1 successfully completed?

9 responses
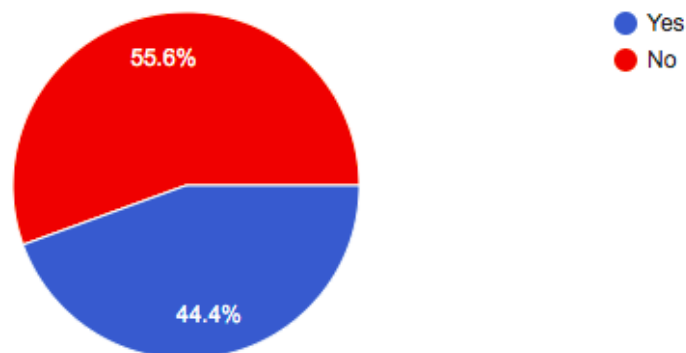
Group	Task	Source of error	Average completion time
A	Task 1: Navigate to career information for English majors.	Top navigation was a pain point 8 out of 9 users tried to find career information by going through Undergraduate related links	3.7 minutes

Finding 4: A sizable minority of English Graduate Students could not find information on degree funding options.
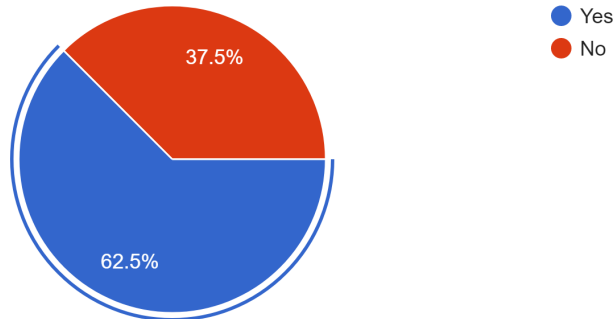
Introduction

62.5% of English Graduate Students managed to locate information on degree funding while 37.5% could not. This task accuracy percentage is below the standard bare minimum of 70% success. The average user completed this task in 2.83 minutes, with a range from 10 seconds to 8 minutes.

Supporting Data

Key Comments:

- "*Participant scrolls down page and voiced she is looking for anything money/FASFA related. She didn't find anything so clicked Contact to see if there was any info there for specific departments. Didn't see anything on contact page.*" – Moderator comment
- "*Scrolling down...clicked on student services under support at bottom...got to financial services--can make appointment, etc. She left the department Redirected to department-clicked on number awards and scholarships--Problem--Awards and scholarships are mixed--not clear which is for program funding. Cannot find graduate-student-funding page...went back to home page. Looking through navigation links, couldn't find the funding link.*" – Moderator comment
- "*Participant notes it's kind of strange there is nothing about funding up at the top of the website. They scroll down to the bottom and find awards and scholarships, decide to click that thinking it will explain different funding options. Participant then clicks on graduate. Participant notes they aren't sure they're in the right place since the is only information on scholarships and not FASFA or anything else.*" – Moderator comment

*For Moderators: Was Task 2 successfully completed?

8 responses

Group	Task	Source of error	Average completion time
D	Task 2: Pretend to be an English graduate student who needs information on how to pay for your program. From the English department website, find graduate student funding options.	3 of 8 participants scrolled down instead of using top navigation Unsuccessful participants looked for specific references to FAFSA and scholarships/awards	2.83 minutes

Finding 5: Prospective English Graduate Students found MFA Creative Writing application deadlines with difficulty.

Introduction

100% of participants completed the task of finding MFA Creative Writing application deadlines within an average time of 2.43 minutes. However, 2 moderators reported that participants had difficulty finding deadlines on the landing page and recommended changes in placement or design.

Supporting Data

Key Comments:

- *"However, on the screen, the date appears in bold at the very top BUT the main display shows the 'Application Process' card and the participant at first scrolled down. Realizing the information he needed was actually above, he scrolled up. Participant commented that if you were actually on the Creative Writing program page, the deadline information was easy to find. But if your starting place was someplace else you would have to hunt for it."*
- *"User clicked on the 'Master's' in the bar menu at the top, and then "Graduation Deadlines", which were not the deadlines for applying to the program. User clicked the back button and then clicked on "Master's" again and this time 'Admissions' and then 'Application Deadline'. User found it confusing that the item that came up was 'Application Process'. The fact that the deadline appeared above wasn't noticeable until the user scrolled down and then back up. User said it would have been more noticeable if maybe it was a different color than black."*

Group	Task	Source of error	Average completion time
B	Task 2: Find the deadline for applying to the MFA Creative Writing program Fall term.	2 of 7 participants scrolled down and could not find deadlines higher on the page	2.43 minutes

Finding 6: Potential Graduate Students may have difficulty making an advising/informational meeting before applying to graduate programs.

Introduction

Testing participants were tasked with finding the information for making an appointment to meet with a graduate advisor, specifically, the director of the Creative Writing Graduate program.

Our findings suggest that improvements to the design of this interface could make the task of contacting a graduate advisor simpler and more intuitive, so that users can get this task done with less time and effort.

Although all testing participants completed the task, many took different paths to finding the information, with about 66% expressing a desire for a more direct and explicit pathway.

A more explicit design of the pathway to this information could be especially helpful to those who are disabled or otherwise impaired, as well as all prospective graduate students moving through on their path to enrolling at the university.

Supporting Data

Key Comments:

- "'*This process was not explicit enough.*'" - Participant
- "'*I would like to have a 'how to contact your advisor [button]' connected to the course page… Would like to connect to that more directly.*'" - Participant
- "*Feels [like] there was never a flat pathway to get to what he needed.*" - Moderator

Finding 7: First-time university students may experience unnecessary difficulty finding the information they need at the PSU English Department Website.

Introduction

University websites can be very frustrating to new users, especially if the new user is a first-time university student and is unfamiliar with the underlying structure of the university system.

In our testing procedures we utilized proxy users for all tests, which means that those testing the interfaces containing undergraduate information were not necessarily individuals without an undergraduate degree. Even so, 64% of assigned tasks taking 3 or more minutes to navigate occurred within the interfaces containing undergraduate information.

While it may make intuitive sense that individuals without an undergraduate degree will struggle more to find information at a university website, our study suggests how this may be exacerbated by interface design issues within the PSU English Department undergraduate pages.

Supporting Data

Proportion of Assigned Tasks Taking 3 or More Minutes to Navigate: Undergraduate vs. Graduate Pages

%64

36%

- ● Undergradate Pages
- ● Graduate Pages
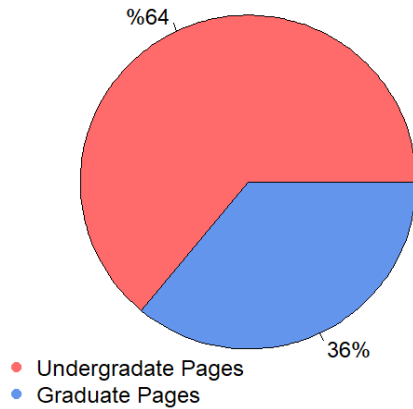
Task: Find the Contact Information for the Program Director of the Graduate Creative Writing Program

Appx. %67

Appx. 33%

- ● Struggled with the task
- ● Completed the task with ease
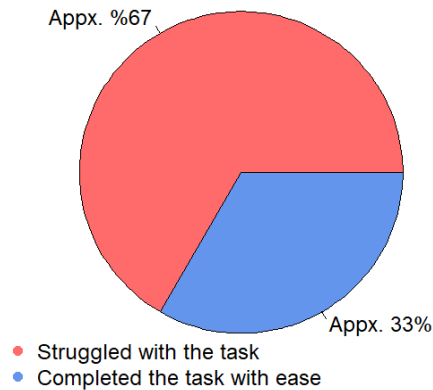
Key Comments:

- "'*It's odd that the "undergraduate Studies" at the bottom of the main page does not have individual links for BA/BS studies, etc.*'"
- "'*From the front page under 'undergraduate studies' there should be direct links to each program page.*'"
- "*Participant did not see the link for undergraduate awards at the top of the page and scrolled by it. Participant vocalized that they probably would've seen it had it been a button*."

Finding 8: Current PSU English Graduate students may experience difficulty locating the information they need about graduate student funding options.

Introduction

Finding information about how to pay for a graduate program is a necessary reality for most PSU Graduate students. Improving website design to make this information easier to navigate and access could benefit this group of users.

In our testing, 38% of PSU Graduate students were unsuccessful when tasked with locating information about Graduate program funding options. A theme also emerges in participant and moderator comments that describe encountering "too many options" when searching for this specific funding information.

Our findings suggest that a more simplified design that clearly defines financial information categories could more easily guide users to information about locating funding options for Graduate programs.

Supporting Data

**Proportion of PSU English Graduate Students
Who Had Difficulty
Finding Funding Information**

Appx. %38

Appx. 62%

- Had Trouble Finding Funding Info.
- Had No Trouble Finding Funding Info.
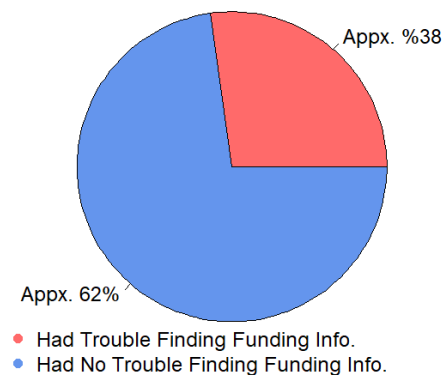
Key Comments:

- "'*It's kind of strange there is nothing about funding up at the top of the website.*'"
- "'*I'm not sure I'm in the right place, since there is only information on scholarships and not FAFSA or anything else.*'"
- "'*Awards and scholarships are mixed, it's not clear which is for program funding.*'"
- "*The stuff wasn't too hard to find but it seems there are a lot of options that could lead you to other places even though they would make sense to click.*"

Finding 9: Current English undergraduate students may experience difficulty finding scholarship information and application deadlines.

Introduction

In our testing procedures, proxy users were asked to find a list of English Department undergraduate scholarships and their deadlines for submission. Although all of the participants completed the task, our research suggests that the path to this information is not intuitive or easy to find.

Our data shows that only about 21% of testers found this information easily, while the remaining testers experienced some degree of confusion, searching a variety of unrelated links before finding the correct path.

Of particular concern is the alternate path of clicking "Undergraduate" appearing in the top navigation bar, followed by "Undergraduate studies" from the dropdown menu, and then scrolling down to "English Department awards." Since this destination does not specifically mention scholarships, our users often hesitated to continue.

Another source of confusion is that when users reach the "Awards and Scholarships" page, the application deadline information appears only in the "Overview" and not with the associated scholarship descriptions, causing confusion about 78% percent of the time.

Supporting Data

Proportion of PSU English Undergraduates
Who Had Difficulty
Finding Undergraduate Scholarship Deadlines

● Found Answer in Less Than 1 Minute
● Found Answer in 1-2 Minutes
● Found Answer in 3-5 Minutes
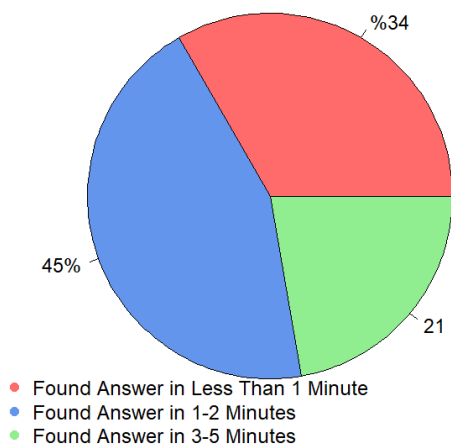
Key Comments:

- "Looking for a link or heading that says scholarships."
- "I'm not seeing anything that looks related to that (scholarships) in the first top half of the screen."
- "I'm seeing the types of scholarships, but I'm not seeing the deadlines.

Objective 5: Identify difficulties with navigability and accessibility as a result of website design

Finding 1: Lack of a 'breadcrumb trail' back to the homepage impact's the site's accessibility.

Introduction

This finding demonstrates a navigational issue that affects larger accessibility of the site. A "bread crumb" trail is a secondary navigational tool that shows the user their location within the website and allows them to quickly return to a page visited prior, without having to return to the homepage or use the browser arrows. The addition of this enables a sense of accessibility to the user on a website described by testing participants as "confusing" and "not very straightforward". Suggestions provided by testing participants demonstrated a user desire for additional navigational tools, especially with participants who navigated mainly through scrolling, rather than a search bar or navigation drop down menu. Similar to a bread crumb trail, a return to home button was also discussed as a user feature to aid in navigation and accessibility.

Supporting Data

Key Comments:

- "*There is no easy way to recover from making a mistake. On each page there should be a way to return to the PSU English Department page as well as other English department program main pages*."
- "*If you were actually on the Creative Writing program page, the deadline information was easy to find. But if your starting place was someplace else you would have to hunt for it.*"
- "*Participants thought there were a lot of options to click and it was hard to navigate to the correct location.*"
- "*A big complaint is that after leaving the English Department's main page, it is not immediately clear how to get back to it*". (Task Path 2, Group B)

Finding 2: Inconsistencies in site layout and design has a negative impact on the site's accessibility.

Introduction

Study participants commonly encountered hurdles while completing program-specific tasks due to Inconsistencies between program pages in terms of layout, design, and button/link locations. These inconsistencies seemed to affect how easy it was for participants to explore, find, and glean information from these pages and move from subpage back to home page. For example, the curriculum pages for other Master's programs compared to the Book Publishing Master's

program are vastly different in not only design, but layout, information presentation, and language used.

Key Comments:

- "*When [participant] clicked on "Creative Writing", they noticed the button links on the Creative Writing page are not in the same order as those on the English Department page. It should be more consistent. From the Creative Writing page there was no way to easily return to the English Department page. The sidebar list of other English programs does not appear to the left of the 'giant' map. These types of features are inconsistently applied.*"
- "*[Participant] is confused that there is career information in the book publishing tab in the navigation bar, but not under the other programs.*"
- "*Useful Links" are way down the bottom of the page, so not all that useful. I shouldn't have to scroll so much.*"
- "*But the layout is confusing, and not very straightforward.*"
- "*The stuff wasn't too hard to find but it seems there are a lot of options that could lead you other places even though they would make sense to click*"

Finding 3: Multiple, clearly defined pathways to desired information may have a positive impact on the site's accessibility.
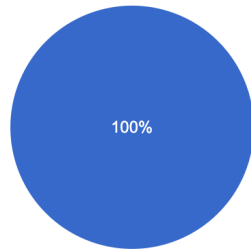
Introduction

Participants had varying opinions on the presence of multiple pathways to reach desired information, with some advocating for a more clearly defined route. Some participants found multiple pathways "helpful" across task assignments and thought the design of this was potentially more accessible as different users may have a diversity of ideas in how to reach content and complete task goals.

There were two tasks, one for prospective graduate students, and one for English undergraduates, where participants were asked to find faculty contact information. Moderator comments noted that participants found this information in different ways. Both of these tasks had 100% successful completion rates, which suggests that multiple pathways to the desired information may have had a positive impact on the site's navigability and accessibility. Participants also completed these tasks in a reasonable amount of time, compared to the averages from other tasks.

Supporting Data

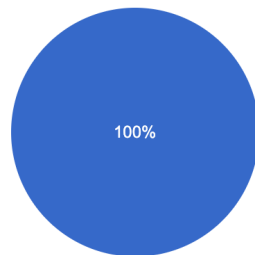*For Moderators: Was Task 1 successfully completed?

7 responses

● Yes
● No

100%

*For Moderators: Was Task 2 successfully completed?

9 responses

● Yes
● No

100%

Task	Avg time, minutes
English Undergrad	
A1. Scholarship deadline	1.96
A2. Office Hours	0.77
A3. Summer Courses	2.5
A4. Film Electives	1.68
English Graduate	
B1. MPTW Electives	1.8
B2. Graduate Funding	2.96
B3. Spring Courses	1.6
B4. Graduation Deadlines	0.92
Prospective Undergrad	
C1. Career Info	3.69
C2. BA + MA Pathway	1.5
C3. Event Registration	1.72
Prospective Graduate	
D1. MFA Director	1.46
D2. App Deadline	1.8
D3. Grad Assistantship	1.28

Key Comments:

- *"User clicked on "Graduate" from the bar menu and then "MFA in Creative Writing" and "Faculty" and then scrolled down and found Leni Zumas picture and contact details."*
- *"First thing is go to the graduate header link. Tried to use Tab to start without a mouse, couldn't do it. used mouse, drop down to faculty link. Command F, found a director of creative writing, but was more looking for 'MFA" and "Graduate". If the moderator had asked to make an advising appointment, I would've followed a different path."*

- *"Participant started on the English Department page; scrolled down and clicked on the contact button, clicked on the creative writing link in the left side bar, scrolled down to the contact button, under the map clicked on faculty page, and found Leni Zumas on the full-time faculty listing page."*
- *"Clicked contact at the top of the page and was routed to "contact English department", so went back to main page, found faculty directory at the bottom of the page eventually, after clicking the contact button on the very very top bar again."*

- *"Starting from the home page - clicked on faculty - and found her contact info right away."[Participant] could tell there were multiple pathways to find the same information, which can be helpful since not everyone's brain works the same.*
- *"I like that you can end up in the same location via two different links. That's helpful.*"

Finding 4: Most users expect important information, navigational tools, and links to be at the top of the page.

Introduction

Comments from usability study participants indicate that placing navigation tools, such as the navigation bar and other buttons and links at the top of the page appears to have a positive effect on site accessibility and navigability. Our data also suggests that users who used the top navigation bar were more successful in completing their tasks.

Supporting data

The following comments demonstrate user expectations that navigation tools, links, and other important information should be at the top of the page:

- "I'm not seeing anything that looks related to that in the first top half of the screen."
- *"Participant notes it's kind of strange there is nothing about funding up at the top of the website.*
- *"From the front page under 'Undergraduate Studies' there should be direct links to each program page."*
- *"...takes a little while to get to good stuff...good stuff equals coursework."*
- *"Useful Links" are way down the bottom of the page, so not all that useful. I shouldn't have to scroll so much."*
- *"The website makes you scroll through a lot of things before getting to the more useful information, mostly the "explore the department' table of contents. People are looking for information, not to lounge and browse."*
- *"...surprised that info to sign up for classes is at the bottom- "explore the department."*
- *"...the "explore the department section" feels like it would be better further up the page..."*
- *"Noticed the "useful links" were at the bottom, confused as to why they weren't at the top if they were important."*=
- *"...seems a little strange to have useful links that far down."*

The following comments demonstrate user success when using the top navigation bar to peruse the site:
- "*Now that was at the top of the screen, which was easy for me.*"
- "*Found it quickly in the navigation bar.*"
- "*The menus at top page more intuitive in how eyes scan when looking at web page.*"

- *"Immediately looking at graduate tab at the top of the homepage."*
- *"The top bar (horizontal) orientation is natural for my eyes when orienting on a webpage. I like the drop-down menu that appears after clicking on a section."*
- *"User clicked on "Graduate" from the bar menu and then "MFA in Creative Writing" and "Faculty" and then scrolled down and found Leni Zumas picture and contact details."*

Conclusion

The above findings and supporting data for the Portland State University English Department was generated through usability testing which gathered quantitative data on the navigability and accessibility of the English department website as well as thoughts, feelings, and emotions of website users as they relate to the website. Specific targets were explored in granular detail through the recruitment of usability testing participants acting as proxy users of the site. Four groups of participants: current English undergraduate students, current English graduate students, prospective undergraduate students, and prospective graduate students were charged with performing tasks to evaluate the site. The findings, analysis, and synthesis of material referenced above is a representation of the many hours of usability testing and moderator notes devoted to this project.

The goal of this report is to share insights and significant events from the field, as well as create a platform where user voices can be heard in a structured, documented manner.

Across these findings several themes emerged that impact user experience of the site:

1. **Word choice and word usage**
2. **Site navigability**
3. **Information Pathways**
4. **Site Design and Layout**

1. Word choice and word usage

Consistent, clear word usage throughout the English Department website is integral to the user having a positive experience and completing tasks. When participants were tasked with finding course electives for the MPTW Program they identified several words that they believed were relevant to their task completion and this resulted in them clicking on various buttons or links that did or did not contribute to their success. Relevant words are bolded below:

- *Participants click on **courses** at top because they felt course information would be under there. Did not see anything about a specific program. Participant then clicks on **Graduate** and sees the **MTPW program**, clicks **curriculum** because they think that might have more information. They then click on the **"technical writing electives"** link.*

  (The following findings support and provide further detail on this conclusion; Objective 2: Finding 1, Task 1, 2, & 3 and Objective 2: Finding 2)

2. Site Navigability

Site navigability is a priority for any website, as perhaps no other factor informs a user's site experience more significantly. The findings of this usability test indicate there are a number of navigability-related areas to focus on to improve the PSU English Department's website.

- User testing revealed that participants who looked for information starting with the English Department homepage navigation bar were more successful in finding the information they needed. Participants revealed that they expected important information to be placed at the top of the page. For example, usability test participants tasked with finding MPTW elective courses were more likely to successfully and quickly find these electives when using the navigation bar, while those who scrolled through the English Department homepage were less likely to find this information.

- "*The top bar (horizontal) orientation is natural for my eyes when orienting on a webpage. I like the drop-down menu that appears after clicking on a section*."

  (See Objective 2: Findings 1 & 4 & Objective 3: Finding 2)

3. Information Pathways
Many participants stated that they wanted multiple, clearly marked pathways to find information. Tasks that had multiple pathways resulted in higher task completion rates.

- "*There is no easy way to recover from making a mistake. On each page there should be a way to return to the PSU English Department page as well as other English department program main pages.*"
- "*there was never really a flat pathway to get what they needed.*"

  (See Objective 2: Finding 3, Objective 2: Finding 4)

4. Site Design and Layout
Participants expressed a desire for consistent design throughout the English Department programs on the website to create familiarity and ease of navigability throughout the site. They also articulated a consistent use of buttons, links, and dropdown boxes in page design would be helpful for navigation.

- For example, the curriculum pages for other Master's programs compared to the Book Publishing Master's program are vastly different in not only design, but layout, information presentation, and language used.

- "*When they clicked on "Creative Writing", they noticed the button links on the Creative Writing page are not in the same order as those on the English Department page. It should be more consistent. From the Creative Writing page there was no way to easily return to the English Department page. The sidebar list of other English programs does not appear to the left of the 'giant' map. These types of features are inconsistently applied*."

(See Objective 2: Findings 3 & 4, Objective 3: Finding 4)

Discussion

All of these themes impact the site's overall accessibility. This is especially crucial when taking into consideration new or prospective students. First-time university students may experience difficulty finding the information they need when visiting the website, and an unfamiliarity with the underlying structure of the university system can be discouraging. This suggests that the information is not intuitive nor easy to find. Accessibility concerns affected both undergraduate and graduate interfaces.

Possible Next Steps

- Clearly define what "academic" words related to coursework, registration, and programs mean, and then consistently use those words throughout the site to help users, especially first-time visitors, navigate to the appropriate information. What is the difference between curriculum and coursework? How does the English Department define these words? Do users see a difference?

- Consider building on the successful completion of tasks beginning from the English Department homepage navigation bar, by representing all topics in the navigation bar through dropdown boxes, buttons, and links. Could the navigation bar be bigger, bolder?

- Consider building on the successful completion of tasks using the navigation bar and reduce user frustration by placing a pathway to relevant information at the top of the page, perhaps in the navigation bar or placement above the fold.

- Increase site accessibility by offering a pathway to information that is reachable from the navigation bar (dropdown box, button, links) and a pathway that is clear to users who instead scroll the page. Pathway confusion could be alleviated by implementing a "breadcrumb trail," a secondary navigation tool that lets the user know their location within the website and permits them to immediately return to a previously visited page without having to return to the homepage first.

- Consider creating consistency in terms of layout, design, and button/link locations across individual program pages and the English Department homepage.