Undergraduate Research Conference Webpage Assessment
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Executive Summary

In fall 2014, the J. Murrey Atkins Library’s Usability Lab conducted an assessment of the Undergraduate Research Conference webpage. The Associate University Librarian for Collections Access & Outreach Services and the Director of Library Communication & Public Relations met with the Director of the Usability Lab and the Usability Assistant to discuss an assessment of the webpage. The webpage is the main provider of information for the conference and is how participants register for the conference.

The objective of the Undergraduate Research Conference webpage is to provide essential information for the conference’s participants. With this being said, the webpage’s usability is crucial to students, staff members, faculty members, and UNC Charlotte organizations associated with the conference.

The assessment was completed by reviewing the webpage’s content and functionality, reviewing similar peer institution’s webpages, and analyzing Google Analytics. The following peer institutions were reviewed:

- Butler University
- College of Staten Island
- UC Davis
- The University of Alabama
- UMass Amherst

The assessment revealed issues that affect the webpage’s efficiency and effectiveness. This report contains a list of recommendations to address these issues. Additionally, the recommendations from the assessment suggest possibilities of inquiry for future usability studies.

Background

The Undergraduate Research Conference webpage is used by students, faculty, staff, and UNC Charlotte organizations. The Undergraduate Research Conference is an annual event at UNC Charlotte that provides undergraduates an opportunity to highlight their research. In addition to bringing attention to the excellent work of university students, the conference allows students to gain experience presenting, compete for awards, and form relationships with their faculty mentors and fellow conference presenters.

Recommendations

The recommendations below are suggestions to make the Undergraduate Research Conference webpage more efficient, desirable, and functional to users. In addition, wireframes were created
and an annotated web tool was used on the webpage to demonstrate the following recommendations.

1. **Condense information.**
   Omitting needless words reduces the noise level of the page, it makes the useful content more prominent, and it makes the pages shorter (allowing the users to see more of each page at a glance without scrolling).

   ![Current Homepage](image1) ![Recommended Homepage](image2)

2. **Consolidate the navigation.**
   A navigation’s purpose is to help users find whatever it is they are looking for, and to tell users where they are on the site. In addition, the navigation identifies what is on the site and how to use the site. “People won’t use your website if they can’t find their way around it” (Krug 51). Shown below are the current navigation and the recommended navigation.

   ![Current Navigation](image3) ![Recommended Navigation](image4)
3. **Break pages into clearly defined areas.**
   Headings reveal the organization of a document and help readers decide which sections they need to read. Providing typographic contrast between headings and the body text with either a different typeface or a different style will define areas and create hierarchy. Headings are often effective in boldface and in a sans serif typeface that contrasts with a body text in a serif typeface (Alred 315).

The layout and design of a document can make even the most complex information accessible. To accomplish accessibility, a design should help readers find information easily; offer a simple and an uncluttered presentation; and highlight structure, hierarchy, and order (Alred 313).

Shown below is the current homepage and the recommended homepage. The current homepage uses the same size typeface for the underlined heading and the body text, which does not create an effective typographic contrast. The recommended homepage example uses different typefaces and styles to differentiate between headings (Arial Bold pt.14) and body text (Times New Roman pt.12) to create an effective contrast, which will allow users to locate their desired information quicker. Please refer to UNC Charlotte’s Web Style Guide at [http://advancement.uncc.edu/university-communications/services/brand-standards/web-standards/web-style-guide](http://advancement.uncc.edu/university-communications/services/brand-standards/web-standards/web-style-guide).
4. **Consistency throughout the subpages.**

All of the subpages within the Undergraduate Research Conference webpage should follow the same style guide to ensure consistency. UNC Charlotte’s Web Style Guide can be located at [http://advancement.uncc.edu/university-communications/services/brand-standards/web-standards/web-style-guide](http://advancement.uncc.edu/university-communications/services/brand-standards/web-standards/web-style-guide).

Shown below are two subpages of the Undergraduate Research Conference webpage. It is obvious that they do not follow the same style guide through the use of headings. The homepage underlines the headings while the Participant Registration page’s headings are bolded, in all caps, and are separated by a line.
UNC Charlotte Undergraduate Research Conference 2015

Date: Friday, April 24, 2015
Location: Barnhardt Student Activity Center
Deadline: TBA

Overview

The UNC Charlotte Undergraduate Research Conference (URC) is a university-wide showcase of research projects completed by undergraduate students of all levels from all colleges and departments in the university. The URC is sponsored by Academic Affairs, the Atkins Library and the Levine Scholars program.

The work presented ranges from in-class projects to year-long honors theses and everything in between. The type of research varies depending on the discipline, and includes everything from philosophical analysis to hands-on data collection in a lab or in the field.

Students have the choice of presenting their work in poster or oral formats. Students may present individually or in groups. Both are judged during the conference and general prizes are awarded by discipline following the keynote speaker.

In addition to departmental awards and Honors College awards, students have an optional opportunity to apply for an Atkins Library Undergraduate Research Award. Five awards of $1000 each will be awarded annually.

Eligibility

Students must be currently enrolled at UNC Charlotte to participate in the conference. Graduate students and post-bac students may participate if 1) the presented research was completed at UNC Charlotte as an undergraduate and 2) their undergraduate graduation date was no earlier than December prior to the conference.

Current Homepage

Current Participant Registration Page

Participant Registration

- Online Registration Opens: March 1, 2015
- Registration Closes/Applications Due: April 1, 2015 at 5:00 PM
- Faculty Advisor Support Letter Deadline* for Atkins Library Awards: April 5, 2015 at 5:00 PM
- Date of Conference: April 24, 2015

In order to participate in the Conference, you must register before the deadline.

Registration Instructions

All participants will need to provide the following during online registration:

- Your name
- Contact information
- Major/minor/expected date of graduation
- Title of research project
- Preferred presentation format
- Name(s), department and contact info for your research advisor(s) (This is who advised your research, not your academic advisor)
- Honors students interested in being considered for Honors College Awards will simply need to check the appropriate box on the registration form.
Conclusions

The assessment revealed issues that affect the webpage’s efficiency and effectiveness. The report outlines an assessment not a usability study, if more concrete data is desired; a usability study should be conducted prior to the 2015 Undergraduate Research Conference.

References
