

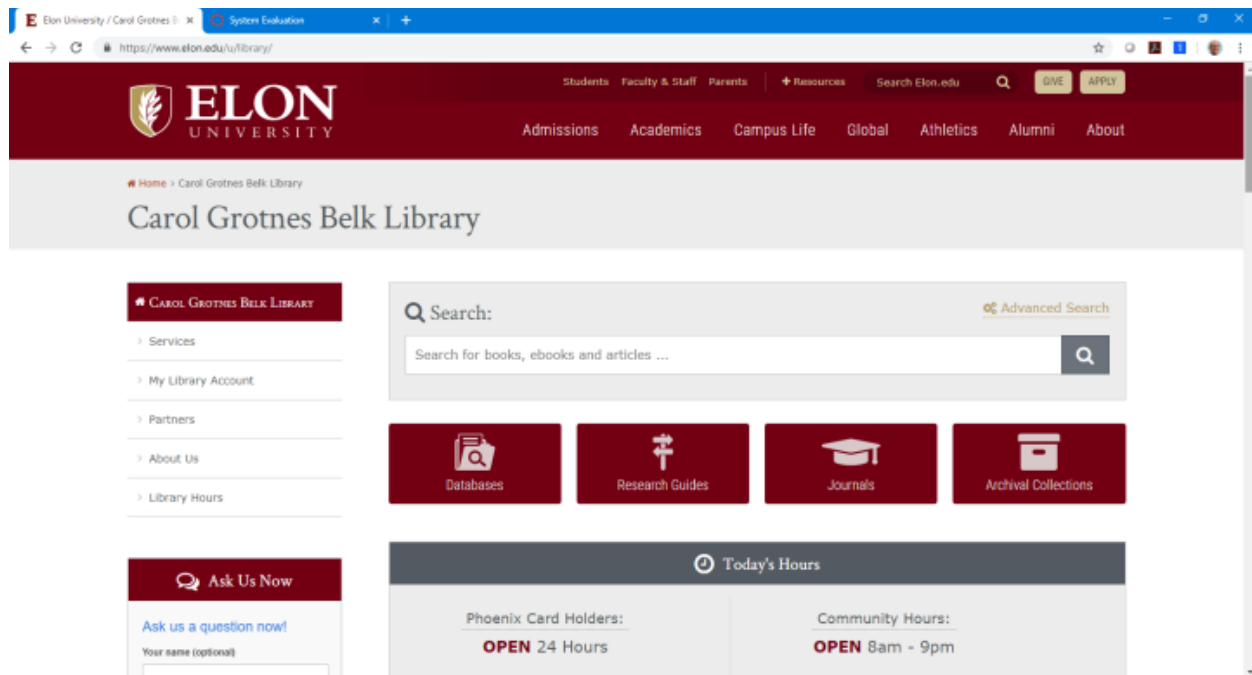
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LIS 640-03: Information Org/Access
System Evaluation Assignment
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Introduction

I enjoy browsing academic libraries. These types of libraries often have outstanding collections of resources that appeal to me as a graduate student. For this assignment, I chose to evaluate the design and functionality of the OPAC of Elon University's Carol Grotnes Belk Library.

Finding the Website and Initial Impressions

The OPAC of Elon University's Library was easy to find. A quick search using google and the search phrase "Elon University Library" returned almost six million results. Fortunately, the top three search results pointed to the university's library. The first result linked directly to the library's home page (<https://www.elon.edu/u/library/>). I was pleased to note the "s" in "https"—code for a secure website. Since this is an academic library, students may login securely to their library accounts. I did not have an account at this library, so I navigated the OPAC as a guest.



The interface uses rectangular box shapes to good effect. The university name is in the upper left corner of the page within a reddish-colored header. To the right of the name are links to selected departments within the university. Below the header is the name "Carol Grotnes Belk Library." Below that are links, on the left side, to specific services within the library. Mid-screen is a large search field located within a light gray box. To help users, the search field displays the universal magnifying-glass icon. This field also includes text which tells users exactly what to do: "Search for books, ebooks and articles." On the upper-right of the search field is a link to "Advanced

Search.” Below the search field are large, rectangular image links to Databases, Research Guides, Journals, and Archival Collections. Below that is a larger rectangular box titled, “Today’s Hours,” along with a small, clock-shaped image. To the left of that is a chat box that allows users the ability to ask questions.

Scrolling down, the lower half of the page is filled with large text and charts that show the total number of “Questions answered via Chat,” the number of “Chat questions answered by month,” total “Librarian Appointments,” and “Librarian Appointments by Month,” and “Visitors by Month,” and “Number of Library Visitors.” These graphics are informative and interesting, but take up too much room, in my opinion.

Everything on the library home page is clearly identified. The location of the search field in the middle of the screen shows that this page is made for searching. The links to all library services are visually prominent. The drawbacks on the homepage are as follows: No information tips pop up when the cursor is placed over graphic or text links, and the library usage statistics are too large.

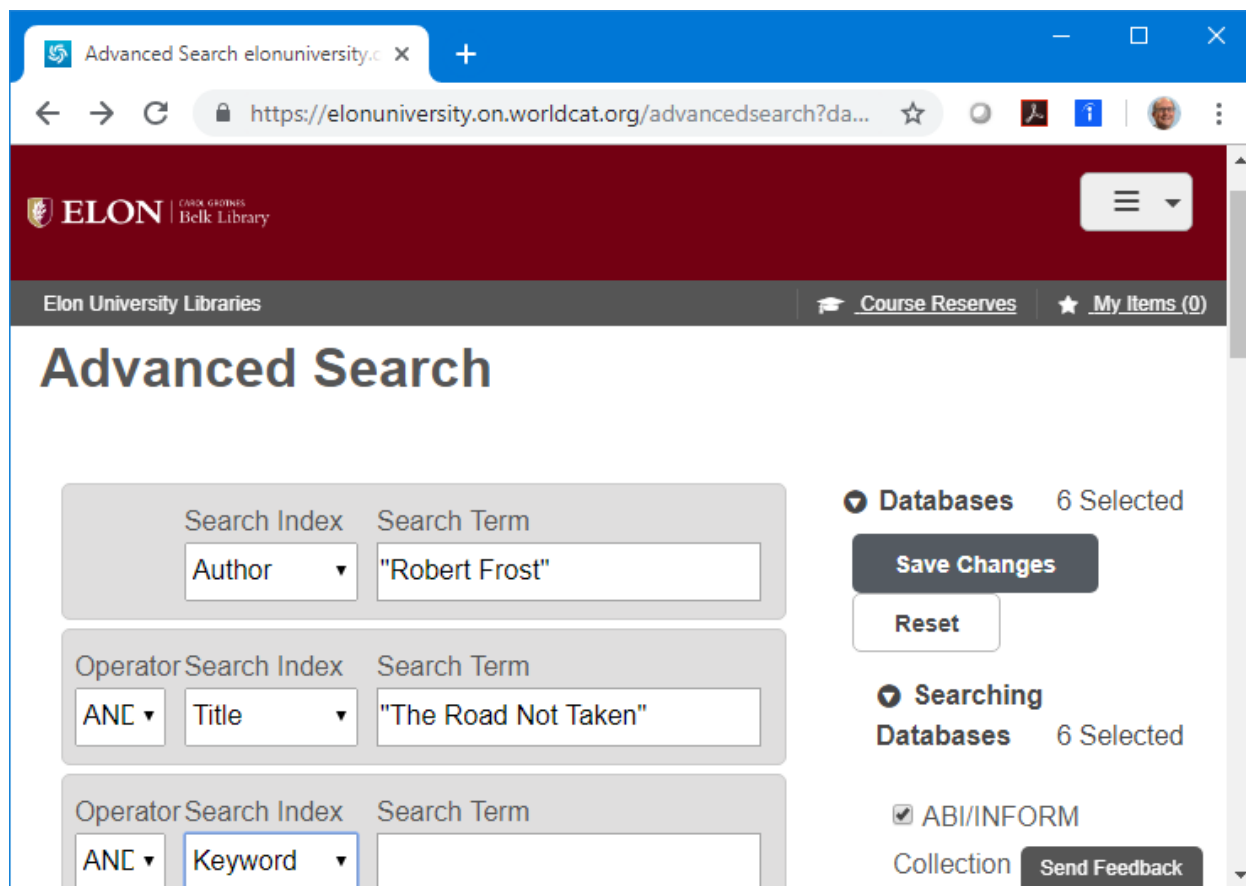
Basic Searches

My first test was to see what kind of results the library search engine would produce. I typed “Robert Frost,” without quotation marks, and clicked the Search key. I got 44,729 hits. I returned to the start page and searched again, this time I entered “Robert Frost” with quotation marks. The results dropped to 13,824 hits. I scanned the first several pages of results and found that they were a mix of books about and by Robert Frost. I next included a Boolean operator to see how the search engine responded. I entered the following query in the search field: “Robert Frost” AND poetry. The search engine responded favorably, dropping the number of hits to 4,850. The first resource displayed was the book “The Robert Frost Reader : poetry and prose.” It featured a short summary below the title, along with the statement, “Held by other libraries worldwide.” For some reason, this statement was not a hyperlink. Next, I clicked on the book title. Immediately, the display changed to a left-right split-frame screen configuration that I had seen on other OPACs. The left frame showed my original search results. The right frame displayed the book title and provided links with more options. Below the title was a link titled “View Description,” which when clicked opened detailed information about the book, including Publication, Physical Description, More Author / Title Information, Language, Staff View (MARC Record, which is available only to those with appropriate login credentials), ISBN, OCLC Number, LCCN, Uniform Title, Contents, Subjects, Summary, Genre, Notes, Bibliography, and Database, which was, not surprisingly, WorldCat. A link invited me to “Explore Editions and Formats.” Below that was a “Check Availability” link, which, when clicked, displayed a link to “Request Item through Interlibrary Loan” and a list of libraries which hold this book in circulation. All this was very familiar to me, much like what I have found at the UNCG Library website. After viewing all these search results, I decided to click the “View Filters” link in the upper-left part of the screen. Under “Library,” I deselected “Libraries Worldwide” and checked “Elon University Libraries.” This dropped search results down to 907 hits. I saw this as significant improvement. Up to now, I had only tested basis search functionality. Based on my search results, I concluded that each term I searched was handled, by

default, as a keyword. To get better results, I needed to use criteria available only with advanced searches.

Advanced Searches

Following the basic search, I decided to more fully test the capabilities of the library's search engine. On the library homepage I selected "Advanced Search." The Advanced Search screen opened to reveal three stacked search fields. In front of each search field was a drop-down menu with a list of twenty-nine "Search Index" options, including Author, Publisher, Subject, Title, etc. I chose to search by Author with the first search term ("Robert Frost") and by Title with the second search term ("The Road Not Taken"). I left the third search term field blank. I scrolled down the screen and deselected "Libraries Worldwide" and checked "Elon University Libraries." I clicked the Search button and received six results. This showed that the Advanced Search feature is very good at narrowing search results. Curiously, four of the six results were not written by Robert Frost, even though I had searched by Author in the first search field.



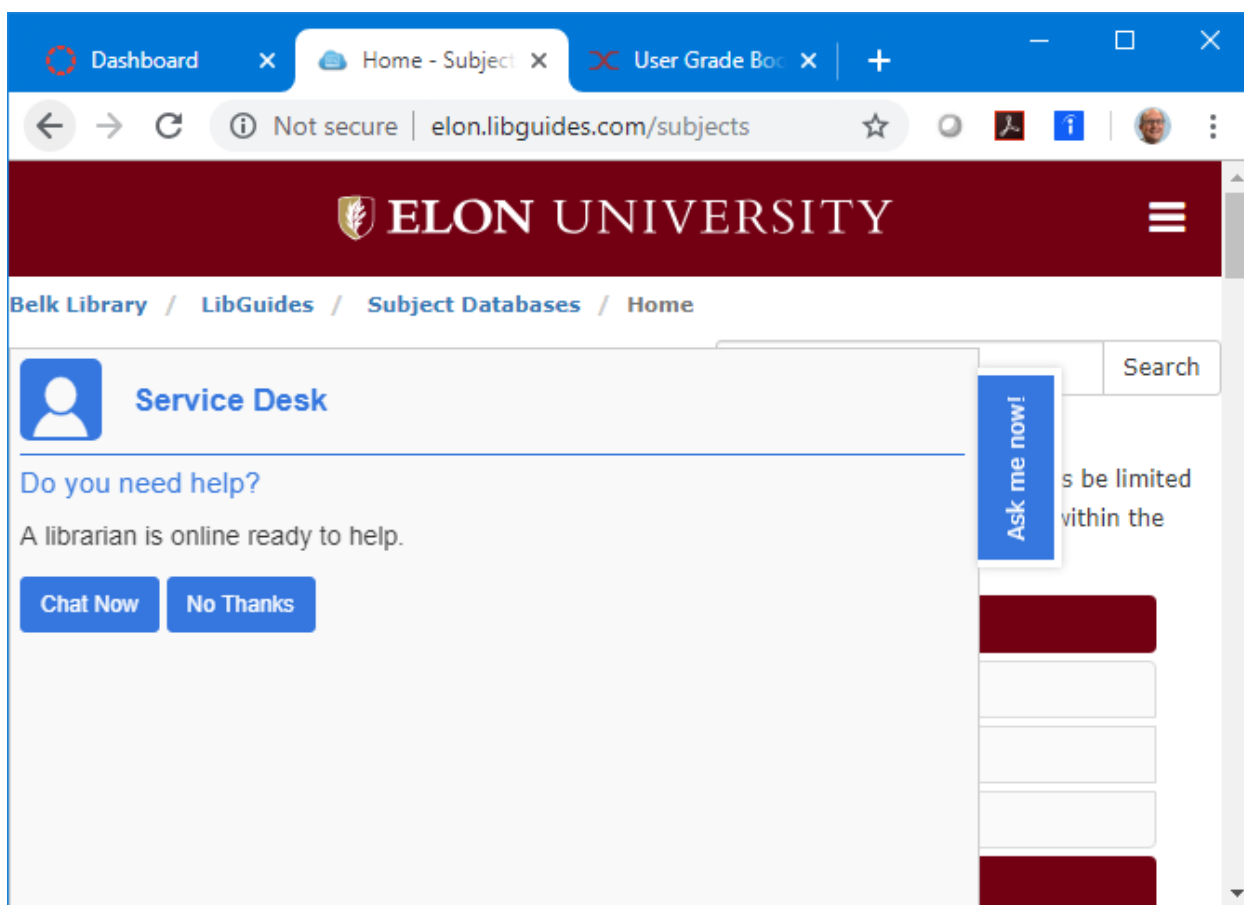
The screenshot displays the "Advanced Search" page of the Elon University Libraries. The page features three stacked search fields. The first field has "Search Index" set to "Author" and "Search Term" set to "Robert Frost". The second field has "Operator" set to "AND", "Search Index" set to "Title", and "Search Term" set to "The Road Not Taken". The third field has "Operator" set to "AND", "Search Index" set to "Keyword", and the "Search Term" field is empty. On the right side, there are buttons for "Save Changes", "Reset", and "Searching Databases 6 Selected". Below these, there is a checkbox for "ABI/INFORM" and a "Send Feedback" button.

I conducted one more advanced search. I used the same criteria as above (Author="Robert Frost", Title="The Road Not Taken"), except I added in the third field a search by Publication Type="book." I received a "No Results Found" message. I increased the scope of my search to "Libraries Worldwide." Still, no search results were returned. The problem appeared to center on the Publication Type. I searched by Publication Type with the search term "book," thinking

Publication Type was synonymous with Document Type. Lack of any search results proved otherwise.

Library Services

In addition to the “Ask Us Now” feature on the library home page, I discovered another help feature that came as a pleasant surprise. During my first visit to the OPAC, a message box appeared on my screen, asking, “Do you need help?” Below that was the statement, “A librarian is online, ready to help.” I was presented with the options “Chat Now” or “No Thanks.” (See figure below). I was impressed by the proactive nature of this service.



Conclusion

I enjoyed the time I spent on the Elon University Library OPAC. I found the interface to be well-designed, intuitive, and easy to navigate. The single search field worked well. The Advanced Search option worked even better. This OPAC showed that it is as powerful and feature-rich as OPACs in much larger institutions. Based on my search results, I concluded that the collections of this library are not especially large. However, due the power of Interlibrary loans, users with borrowing privileges should be able to obtain anything they need. Finally, the pop-up “online librarian” was an unexpected, helpful feature. Overall, the Elon University Library OPAC offered me a pleasant search experience.