**ECS Website Usability Experiment Targeting Potential Postgraduate Students**

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# Abstract

**One of Victoria University’s objectives is to attract high quality post-graduate students to undertake PhD theses. Students searching for “engineering" and “computer science" via search engines will invariably end up at the School website rather than the University website. The project leader needs to know whether the School's own website does a satisfactory job of:**

2. **Adequately addressing the majority of issues that prospective students would have, so that good students are not deterred from applying,**
4. **or quickly directing the prospective students to the relevant part of the wider University website, in a way that doesn't then confuse the user.**

**This experiment is designed to test the ECS website meets these two standards.**

# Introduction

**The project will be comprised of an experiment concerning potential computer science and engineering students. Particular emphasis is given toward those who are postgraduate students.**

**The experiment itself will seek to evaluate those students who have otherwise had no previous contact with Victoria or Auckland University websites. This was done to ensure that the relevant strengths and weaknesses of the two websites could be compared against subsequent other websites. Again emphasis is given to the fact that these students have had no prior experience with either academic institution.**

# Type and number of the participants

**The experiment will be comprised of thirty random people in the age bracket 20-30. This means sample size should not affect the experiment. We will find these people through the use of posters placed around town and google ads. Significant rewards in the form of $30 will be offered to encourage people to participate in the experiment.**

# Assets

#### Assets required include access to the computer labs in the ECS department of Victoria University as well as the mobile devices which will be supplied by the test subjects. The survey sheets will be printed at Victoria University, and pens will be supplied by the experiment coordinators.

# Methodology

**The participants will all come in to the university to one of the smaller private rooms on Cotton Level 2, at a time convenient to them, and separate of each other as we don't want them affecting how each other behaves during the experiment.**

**They will not be informed of many of the details of the experiment before undertaking it as this may also change how they behave during the experiment which may happen if they think lot about the experiment before undertaking it. They will initially be told we are testing computer systems. Upon arriving they will either be told to pretend they are applying to study engineering/computer science as a post-graduate student at Victoria University and at Auckland University and that they are applying from overseas.**

**The whole experiment will be videoed in order to capture the information needed, along with a video screen capture for the entire time the experiment is being conducted. They will attempt this task on the same browser they use the most or on the mobile device they use the most (they will bring this, if they can't then one will be supplied).**

**After conducting the experiment on a device they will fill out a survey. This means they will do two surveys in total, with the second including comparison questions. These questions will address such issues as user satisfaction, with particular consideration to ease of use and whether or not they could find all the information they needed.**

**The participants will be told to find:**

2. **The scope and personnel in the School's research groups, along with relevant contact details**
4. **How to apply to enrol for a PhD**
6. **The requirements for moving to Wellington, especially from overseas**
8. **How to apply for a scholarship to help cover (some of) the costs of studying**

**The survey questions will be:**

2. **Could you find all the information you were looking for?**
4. **If not, what could you not find?**
6. **How easy was it to find what you were looking for? 1-10**
8. **How easy to find the necessary info was it compared to any other sites and/or devices you've used**

**Statistics measured will be:**

2. **Number of clicks to find each piece of information**
4. **Total number of clicks**
6. **Time to find each piece of information**
8. **Total time**
10. **Error rate**
12. **Comparison of different universities/devices**

**Each participant will only use one type of device as if they use the website twice the second time they will know where to go for the info they need and this will give an inaccurate result. The experiment will be conducted at university as the university has all the necessary equipment and space to do it.**

# Limitations of the experiment

**There are number of limitations to this experiment as it is very unlikely to achieve an accurate result for people who are overseas. We could use people currently overseas in the experiment but have chosen not to as we will not be able to be present when they undertake the experiment. Also, we would not be more difficult to confirm whether we obtained the appropriate error rate(for example), or e.g the time for the participant to select the section that he/she was asked to look for.**

**Also, any possible language barriers that an overseas student might hit, are not present in the experiment. Also the difference in knowledge of Wellington and Victoria University an overseas person would have compared to a Wellingtonian makes the experiment less realistic.**

**The most accurate way to conduct the experiment would be to do it with people who are genuinely interested in post graduates study at Victoria University, but to find enough of these people would be most likely impossible.**

Conclusion

After conducting the experiment and collating the statistics, we will confirm whether or not the subjects were able to find the necessary information on the ECS website, whether or not it was difficult, and if so, how difficult. Also, we will compare the ECS website’s performance in relation to Auckland University’s website.