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U2 Assignment: Website Review

**Websites Evaluated:**

USC Libraries Student Assistant Training Tutorials

<http://libguides.usc.edu/training/homepage>

Middlebury College Student Employees Wiki

<https://mediawiki.middlebury.edu/wiki/LIS/Student_employees>

**Compare and Contrast:**

Each of these sites has been developed to assist student workers with onboarding and employment policies and procedures at their respective institutions, University of Southern California and Middlebury College. Both institutions have made efforts to keep the design of their suites simple by using third party applications to build the page. Middlebury College is using a wiki-based interface, while USC has opted for the libguide format that is commonly used by many academic libraries. Both structures have their merits and their faults.

The libguide format is highly organized with a left aligned vertical navigation bar providing links to pages created by the staff. This format is very simple and it is easy for patrons, in this students to navigate the site. A potential issue with the libguide format is that the site can become very overwhelming due to information overload, especially if pages become too text heavy.

The wiki format on the other hand has a more linear flowing design and has elements in common with blogs or other wiki pages. Navigation of this site is provided through page anchors and the user must scroll vertically to access information. The wiki format allows for ease of reading however, issues can arise from contextual links that may divert the path of the user. Wiki sites by their nature are quite text heavy as well, which could cause issues for a user seeking information quickly.

**Strengths and Weaknesses:**

USC’s student site is quite visually appealing and users are able to quickly navigate around the site. In order to avoid the pitfall of text heavy pages, noted above, the designers have chosen to embed instructional videos from the library’s YouTube account. Each of these videos is under 4 minutes long and provides brief instruction on the subject at hand. A benefit of using YouTube is that the library does not have to host videos on its servers, however there is a drawback in that the library did not uncheck the “Show suggested videos when the video finishes” which would prevent third party videos from appearing on the library’s page.

A further issue with USC’s page is accuracy. According to the time stamp at the bottom of the page, the website has not been updated in just under two years. This means that the information presented may not be entirely accurate, especially if the library has changed any of its systems, policies or procedures with which students would come into contact. Dead links were also observed on the pages “How to Clock in & Out in WORKDAY” and “Evaluating Sources”. It seems that developer was using a third party application Thinglink to embed interactive graphics, however these links are not working.

A final issue noted with this site is that all in-text links on all pages open new browser tabs which can lead to multiple iterations of the site displayed in the browser. This could lead to confusion on the part of the user and causes unnecessary clutter.

Middlebury’s Student Employee site is very simple, but that is not necessarily a bad thing. The user is able to scroll vertically through the page to locate information as needed. The content box on the right side provides page anchors to the major sections of the site and it seems the developers did not attempt to overload the user. All links open within the same browser tab thus limiting clutter. The site developers did not seem to fall into the trap of creating contextual that might lure the reader off task.

If there are any issues, they are relatively minor. The content box is fixed rather than floating on the page so once a user clicks on an anchor, they must scroll upward to access the box again. Links to supplemental materials or information do not stand out very well and may be overlooked. The page itself is quite narrow and the site has not been updated in a year or so.

**Use Cases:**

**USC –** A student worker mightfind themselves in the position of having to assist a visiting scholar without the benefit of a supervisor to assist with policy questions. The student in this case could pull up the site, click on “Borrowing and Loan Information”, and then access the borrowing privileges policy for non-USC patrons.

**Middlebury** – An event may cause a student worker to have to miss a shift. The student is new and unsure of the policy, so he/she would access the Student Employee Policy Handbook on the training wiki. The student may use the content box on the right to access “Student Staff Substitution Procedure” or he/she would scroll down the page to the appropriate policy.