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**Thesis Project: Galvin Library Website**

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# Introduction

The current website for the Paul V. Galvin library (library.iit.edu) was designed and developed prior to my arrival at IIT in 2008. I because responsible for the site in 2010, when I accepted the position of Digital Services Librarian. My first changes were organizational: creating code libraries for re-use, documenting best practices, and making improvements to the site--mostly automating more mundane tasks.

Building a new library site has been on my list of projects for some time, and I have made significant progress towards that over the past year. My goal is to create a vastly different site than the one we have now using three key concepts: implementing a content strategy, highlighting the library’s electronic resources, and using a user-centered approach to design.

# Implementing a Content Strategy

## Content Inventory

The first step in developing the new site was to create an inventory of pages on the current site. This was done by one of the reference department’s student workers. At my direction, she updated a spreadsheet with each page’s title, URL, and a brief summary of the content. Another student looked up year-long site analytics for each page. Pageview counts were used rather than number of sessions as Google Analytics defines sessions based on a default time of 30 minutes, and the library’s popular bank of computers can be used by several students within that timeframe. These totals were then calculated against the number of pageviews overall.

The analytics were less useful than I anticipated they would be. The fines and fees page, for example, had an access rate of only 0.09%, but this is still critical content that will need to be included in the new site. Pages outlining library policies and services have a similarly low percentage of pageviews, but still must remain on the site so that staff have publicly-available text to refer to when enforcing an unpopular policy.

One area where the analytics were helpful was in viewing the pageviews for the satellite libraries under my purview. Currently, the Graham Resource Center (located in Crown Hall on the main campus) and the Institute of Food Safety & Health Library (located at the Moffett campus) have their own sites that exist as subfolders under the main domain (library.iit.edu/grc). They have their own content, but the vast majority of the pages are just pulling content in from the main site using PHP include functions. Each library has a separate code for analytics tracking, and the statistics have shown that simply including a page that lists each library’s hours and locations will be sufficient for the new site.

## Content Layout

The greatest improvement to the site will be in having a more thoughtful plan in how the content is presented to the users. The most pertinent information is not always highlighted, for example, on the faculty page (http://library.iit.edu/faculty/), there is a link to information for new IIT faculty, but it is the very last item listed and will scroll off the page on smaller computer monitors.

Our current site was hand-coded using PHP and a MySQL database; there is no content management system to help control the flow of information. Our new site will be built in Drupal and will allow us to plan for related content rules that will automatically display along with certain subjects.

### Microinteractions

I recently heard about the concept of micro interactions: a piece of code intended for one specific task, such as inviting a user to “like” a Facebook page or sign up for an email list (King 2014). Many of the examples I’ve seen are for marketing purposes, but I was thinking the idea could be leveraged for patron questions as well. One example would be on one the policies pages; the text could end with a form: “Have more questions about our 24-hour access policy? Ask us here,” that would send an email to the appropriate department. I expect t¬¬¬hat fewer questions would be left unanswered in users’ minds if we offer a “point of sale” contact method rather than making the user locate the information on another page.

### Increase Readability

The current site is very text heavy and written in paragraph style rather than outlines. Many of the current site’s pages are written at a grade fourteen reading level or above. This should be lowered substantially to remove barriers to students accessing our resources (Costello 2014) and will be particularly helpful for our non native-English speaking students.

# Highlighting electronic resources

## Remove the catalog search from the home page

The home page of the current library website (library.iit.edu) includes a search box that sends a query to the local instance of the library’s online public access catalog (OPAC). There only three types of items an OPAC search. The first type includes physical items in the library’s collections: books, video materials, theses, etc. The second includes bibliographic records for electronic books from vendors that supply us with this information. Books24x7 and Springer Link are two vendors that supply us with these records, but they are in the minority; the library does not receive (nor could our infrastructure accommodate) files of the millions of journal articles that comprise the majority of our database subscriptions. The third type of items included in OPAC search results are scanned files from the HathiTrust digital project. This includes digitized content from the Google Books and Internet Archives projects, as well as individual libraries’ digitization efforts.

Students will often ignore all other options on the library home page in favor of entering their research topic directly into the home page search box. Some searches are fruitful: a search for “javascript” will turn up many relevant examples from our e-book subscriptions (see result at http://tinyurl.com/omqsrut). If the search doesn’t locate items owned by the Galvin Library, however, the results page will either show results from the HathiTrust database, or display a “no results found” message. An example would be a search of the fall of the Roman Empire. Searching for this phrase will return many results from the OPAC (seen here: http://tinyurl.com/q5vt9mx), but it is unlikely that an undergraduate student writing a short paper for a history class will be interested in the five-volume set written in 1845—this was the first item returned when this paper was written.

Students who only search for their topic from the library home page become frustrated by the limited results and often abandon the library site for Google. Software has been developed to simulate the Google experience for library users; it is called a “discovery layer” and allows an institution access to a centralized index of millions of journal articles, along with the local holdings of the library (Hoeppner).

Galvin Library does not have a subscription to discovery later software such as Primo, Summon, or AquaBrowser, so it is imperative we improve the display of our electronic resources. The library budget from 2013 allocated 88% of its purchasing funds on subscription resources like databases versus 3% of one-time purchase of books, videos, and similar items. This suggests that the site should focus more on database subscriptions rather than books, but that is not the case. Below is a screenshot of the library’s home page, with book resource links highlighted:



Next is the same page with the library’s electronic resources highlighted (those that can be accessed from off-campus).



All of these items require an additional clicks to get to the information, something many students aren’t willing to attempt. One major change to the new site will be to remove the OPAC search box from the library home page and replace it links that will more quickly direct students to databases. The new home page change will reflect the preference for electronic items over print. This will also bring the site into alignment with the library’s vision of providing “innovative programs, infrastructure and outreach” (Paul V. Galvin). A recent study has shown that use of the library’s databases or e-books are one predictor of success in first year undergraduates: students who used the library and its resources had a higher average GPA than those who did not (Soria, 154).

## Add a database quick search on the new home page

There is a method to allow students to perform a search of several—not all—subscription databases that could be placed on the home page of the new site without additional cost. Interfaces by the companies EBSCO and ProQuest have the ability to search several of their own database holdings. For the student quickly looking for articles to support a short research paper, a search form such as this may provide enough immediate results to encourage them to stay on the library’s website instead of abandoning it for Google.

# User-Centered Design

## Customize the main navigation to library’s needs

The look and feel of the current library website was developed by IIT’s Marketing and Communication department. It uses the same color scheme, header and footer as the university site. The only areas that were customized for the library were the address and contact links; all of the other items remained the same. One problem our students have with this design is with this secondary header:



These links were designed to appeal to people who are not currently students at IIT, but prospective students, employers, and former students. Current students looking for library resources often click on these links because of their bright colors and prominence on the page. Doing this removes them from the library website: library.iit.edu is located on a different server than [www.iit.edu](http://www.iit.edu/) so that we can easily make changes to our environment. Students become confused when they click on one of these links and leave the library site entirely.

The header on the new IIT site would cause even more confusion for students. Below is a screenshot of the new site at web.iit.edu with the “research” submenu displayed:



None of the submenu links shown point to library resources, even though the main heading is “research.” This past spring I made the case to the Marketing and Communications team for the library to customize this header for our own use. Below are the statistics I collected from Google Analytics and sent to the team:

Over a 12-month period (April 1, 2013 – April 01, 2014):

* The library website had 309,091 visits, 32% which originated on-campus.
* Outside of the home page, our main visitor paths (called “users flow” in Google Analytics) consisted of directories that can only be accessed by IIT faculty, staff, and currently-enrolled students:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Site directory accessed** | **Description** |
| /menu | Users are directed here after they have logged into to IIT’s portal system and selected the “library e-resources” link. |
| /login | Users are redirected to this login page when they try to access any content restricted to the IIT community (excluding alumni). |
| /databases | This is the main database page. The page itself is not restricted, but links to all subscription databases require user authentication through a proxy server and are only available to current students. |
| /blackboard | This page displays once a student has logged into Blackboard and clicked the “Library Resources” link. |

I also included a mockup of the proposed custom header for the library:



The combination of statistics and mockup was successful; the Marketing and Communications team will allow us to create our own header for the website.

## User personas

I wanted to create user personas to guide design decisions for the new site. There was no user testing that done for the current website, and I think that it is evident in the current site’s design: the home page includes more than 50 links. This obscures the three-to-four links that are constantly used, and so I was determined to make IIT student input a large factor in the site redesign.

I advertised within the university’s daily email communication for students willing to be interviewed about their research habits. I chose six to interview: two graduate students and four undergraduates, with five different areas of study between them. I scheduled to interview them in reference suite, which is not a public area; each interview lasted 30 to 45 minutes. I received permission from all the students to record the audio of these sessions.

I used the same question structure for each interview, borrowing heavily from the topics suggested in Mulder’s *The User is Always Right: A Practical Guide to Creating and Using Personas for the Web* (65-68).

|  |
| --- |
| **Interview Questions for Persona Development** |
|  |
| **History with the library** |
| Describe your first experience with library, was it in person or on the web? |
| Was the first visit successful? |
| What was your impression of the library website after you used it for the first time? |
| How often do you come back to the website? |
|  |
| **Domain experience and knowledge** |
| Tell me about how you conduct research for an assignment |
| Do you use our journal articles? How do you go about finding articles that are helpful to your research? |
| What other sites do you use for research? |
| What do you like/dislike about those other sites? |
| How does Galvin's site compare to these sites? |
|  |
| **Goals and Behaviors** |
| What do you use the library site for? |
| Walk through their last visit to the website, step by step |
| How do you get to the information you want? |
| Have you ever contacted the library for help with an assignment? When, how, and how did it go? |
| What do you use the most / the least and why |
| Things you want to do on the site and can't |
| Things you wish were easier or different |
| How, when, why you use a different site |
|  |
| **Attitudes and Motivators** |
| How would you describe the site to a friend? |
| How would you describe the process of using the site? |
| What do you like most/least about the site? |
| What would influence you to use the site more? |
|  |
| **Opportunities** |
| What do you think about the following (also include things that come up in conversation) |
| Redesigning the site to be more streamlined |
| Not using third-party services |
| Including help information on each page, like the hours |
| Would you use these new features? Why and how often? |
| What is the most important improvement that should be included in the new site? |

After the interviews were complete, I realized that I had limited my subjects to students who were proactive enough to read university communications and respond to a survey. I also wanted to get the perspectives of students who don’t normally engage with the library, so I developed a short, five-minute interview that used a subset of the questions above and conducted several additional interviews outside of the student cafeteria at lunchtime.

Here are some paraphrased quotes from both the short and extended interviews:

If you go to library.iit.edu, it shows up one way. If you go to it through Blackboard, it shows up a different way. And if you go to it through [my.iit.edu/ library resources], it shows up a different way.

My “perfect site” would include a single search box that searches all IIT resources.

I would like the site to be more simple, with a better layout and color scheme.

I use the SciFinder database from the databases page and start with an author search. If the author is prolific, I'll use the title stub from the citation I have. I also might Google the author first, and then use Google Scholar to see what references come up.

The interviews helped me define two types of student users: those who wouldn’t normally use the library website, but need to in order to access subscription resources, and those who are interested in learning about library resources and use the website as the first stop in their research. Rather than thinking about these types as undergraduate versus graduate students, I instead created the “sporadic” and “power” user personas that can be viewed in the appendix: *Harried Javier* and *Resolute Rebecca*.

Javier and Rebecca’s personas are now posted above my computer so that I will remember to consider their needs as progress on the site continues. I hope to create a faculty persona in the future as well.

## User experience testing

The project I conducted with two classmates for the COM525 (User Experience Research and Evaluation) class helped inform the approach I will use to create a “database finder” to help guide students to scholarly library sources. The semester-long project started with interviewing students to find out how they conduct research for their assignments. We were not surprised to find out that students preferred to use Google as it is already a tool they use every day. What did surprise us was how they would simply accept whatever results they found in Google and would not bother seek help from another source, whether from a database or from IIT librarians. Here are some work activity notes from that process:

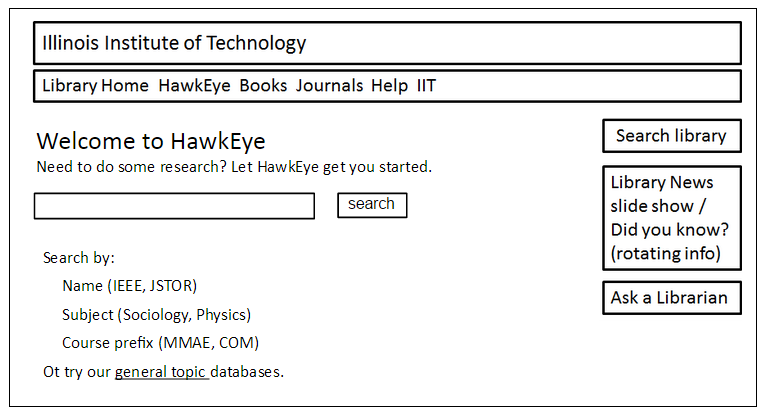
I'd rather use Google Scholar first because it searches many databases instead of just one at a time.

I used Google to find people who agreed with my thesis statement to find resources for my paper.

The user thinks the library's material is very reliable, but there's not as much available as compared to Google Scholar.

The last note in particular highlights the need for better design in the library website. The library has much more information than will appear in Google Scholar, but the site needs to provide better access to it.

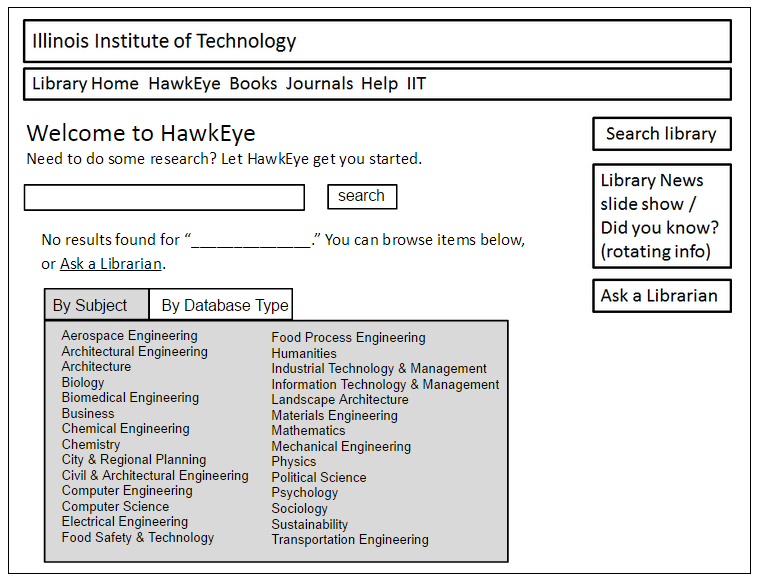
Working from the user research, we designed a very simple Google-like paper prototype that students could use to find a subscription database on the new library website, named “HawkEye.” It would include each database’s name and description, as well as tags with IIT course prefixes (MMAE, ECE, etc.) so that students could quickly find resources tied to one of their classes. The search box would be the most visible item, with a list of suggested ways to use it.



HawkEye home page

We anticipated that students would enter searches that were too discrete to be successful, so we constructed a more detailed error page. The error page would still include the search box, but would also provide direct links to database resources by subject area and content type:

HawkEye prototype – error page



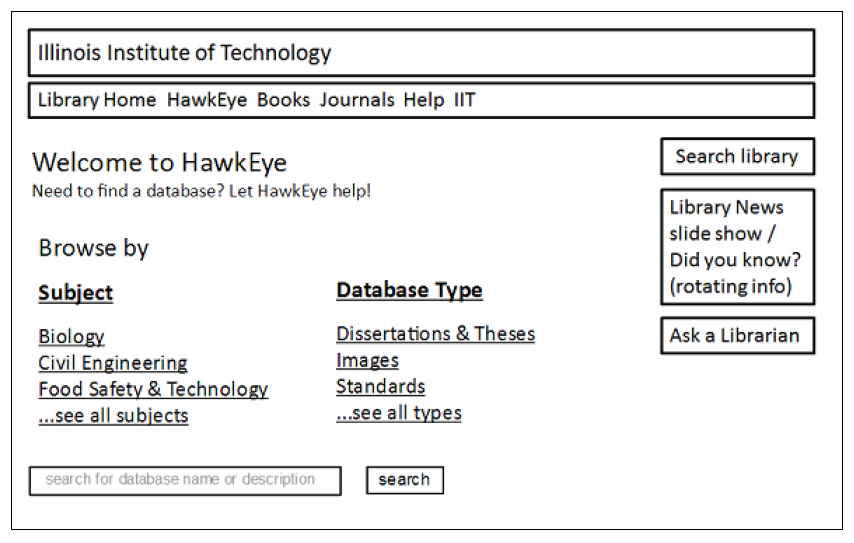
The results were conclusive: our design was not successful. The testers ignored the directions on the home page in favor of submitting too-discrete entries into the search box. One task was to locate a database by the type of content it contained:

You have an assignment to write a 4-page paper on animal physiology for your biology class. Your professor has instructed you to cite at least 2 sources from scholarly articles. You have arrived at the HawkEye home page to search for these sources.

As noted earlier, our testers used terms that were too narrow (animal physiology) instead of those tied to a particular subject or course (biology). The main take-away from this project for me was: don’t make it look like Google if you can’t make it act like Google.

In the executive summary section of the report, we included a revised home page that focused more on browsing than on searching:

HawkEye prototype – revised home page after user testing



I am committed to continuing user experience testing throughout the design and build process. It will not be as expansive as the semester-long research I conducted with my COM525 team, but I plan on creating many small, quickly-completed tests to help me make design and content decisions while I build the site.

# Conclusion

The work on the site continues, and I am now working on mini-projects to recreate the dynamic content that exists in our current site, such as pulling library hours from a Google calendar and creating a custom textbook lookup module. The addition of an Information Technology Librarian this past spring has been a boon for the new environment’s server setup and maintenance, and he is interested in learning how to create a complex site in Drupal as well.

I do not have the luxury of working on this site full-time, so it is important to have a roadmap to use to track its progress. The IT Librarian and I have been using Google Docs to work both collaboratively and asynchronously. With two librarians and several student workers, I hope to have the site ready—or nearly ready—to launch in the fall of 2015.

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# Appendix: User Personas

## Javier



## Rebecca

