

Week 5 – In-Class Assignment

Group Members

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Heuristic Design Principles

The three pages we have chosen for this assignment are:

1. Undergraduate Admissions: <https://admissions.charlotte.edu/>
2. School of Professional Studies: <https://professional.charlotte.edu/>
3. School of Professional Studies (Programs):
https://professional.charlotte.edu/programs/?program_type%5B%5D=67&program_type%5B%5D=47&program_type%5B%5D=55

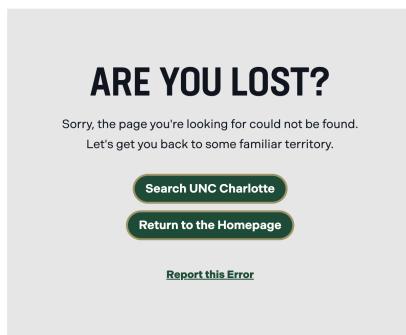
Here is our analysis of these pages:

1) Visibility of system status

This heuristic refers to keeping the informed about what's going on, keeping the user aware of the current status of the system.

Successful Example

The site uses error messages constantly when pages have changed or have become inaccessible. This is helpful to keep the user informed about the status of the page or information they are seeking.



Unsuccessful Example

In a similar vein, the error messages don't provide any context. In other words, the user does not know if the information has changed location, or if it's fully out of date. No context is provided about the status of the page or information they may be looking for.

Recommendation

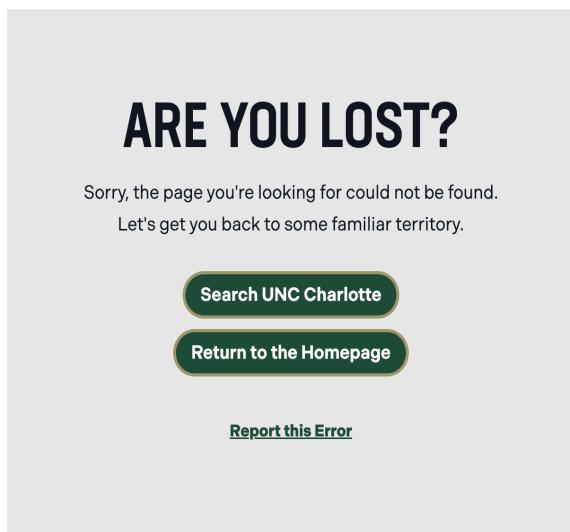
Our recommendation here depends on the source of the error. If the information has moved, this should be noted and an updated page or suggestions should be made.

2) Match between system and the real world

This refers to a certain alignment between system interactions and the real world. Close alignment with the idea of mental models.

Successful Example

When an error is encountered, such as for the Undergraduate Admissions page, the error page refrains from using jargon such as “Error 404” and instead uses more plain and familiar language that mimics the real world. The users can easily understand they’ve encountered a dead end.



Unsuccessful Example

When you are filtering something, such as with a list of the Professional Studies Programs at UNCC, you expect this to be a “one time” action. Meaning you select your filter criteria and the results will change accordingly. We discovered that this is not the case – the user needs to hit “Apply” up to four times to actually apply filters over the program list. This is not intuitive and a user might click a checkbox thinking it’s filtering the results, but it does not until you physically click “Apply”.

A screenshot of a search interface. It features a horizontal search bar with the placeholder text "Search the programs...". To the right of the search bar are two buttons: a dark blue "Search" button and a light blue "Reset" button.

The screenshot shows a user interface for searching academic programs. On the left, there are two filter sections: "PROGRAM TYPE" and "LOCATION TYPE".

PROGRAM TYPE: Includes checkboxes for Bachelor's, Boot Camp, Doctoral, Graduate Certificate, Master's, and Professional Credit. Below the checkboxes are "Apply" and "Clear" buttons.

LOCATION TYPE: Includes checkboxes for Hybrid, In Person, and Online. Below the checkboxes are "Apply" and "Clear" buttons.

On the right, there is a search bar with placeholder text "Search the programs...", a "Search" button, and a "Reset" button. Below the search bar is a "PROGRAM TYPE" dropdown menu with the same options as the filter on the left.

The search results are displayed in a grid format:

- Academically or Intellectually Gifted (AIG), Graduate Certificate** (Cato College of Education) - **EXPLORE PROGRAM**
- Advanced Literacy Instruction & Intervention, Graduate Certificate** (Cato College of Education) - **EXPLORE PROGRAM**

Below the results, there is a "COLLEGE/SCHOOL" section with a dropdown menu showing "Graduate Certificate".

Recommendation

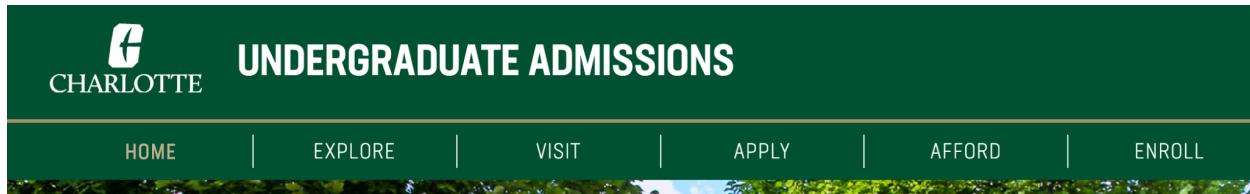
Our recommendation would be to adjust the functionality of the list filters to eliminate the need to click “Apply” to execute, or remove, the filter from the data. This would better match the real world, where filtering is typically one, intuitive action and not multiple steps (such as hitting buttons in multiple different places).

3) User Control and Freedom

This emphasizes a user's ability to exist or back out of decisions, particularly those that are irreversible.

Successful Example

On the Undergraduate Admissions home page, if you navigate to the Applications page by clicking "Apply", you can easily back out and return to the home page by clicking "Home". This allows you to exit the view and return in a quick and easy way.



Unsuccessful Example

This heuristic is poorly applied on the Professional Studies Programs page in accordance with filtering. To remove a filter, the user should be able to "uncheck" the box. We discovered that this does not work to remove the filter and go back to the unfiltered results. The user has to take the additional step of hitting "Apply" for them to undo the filter action.

Recommendation

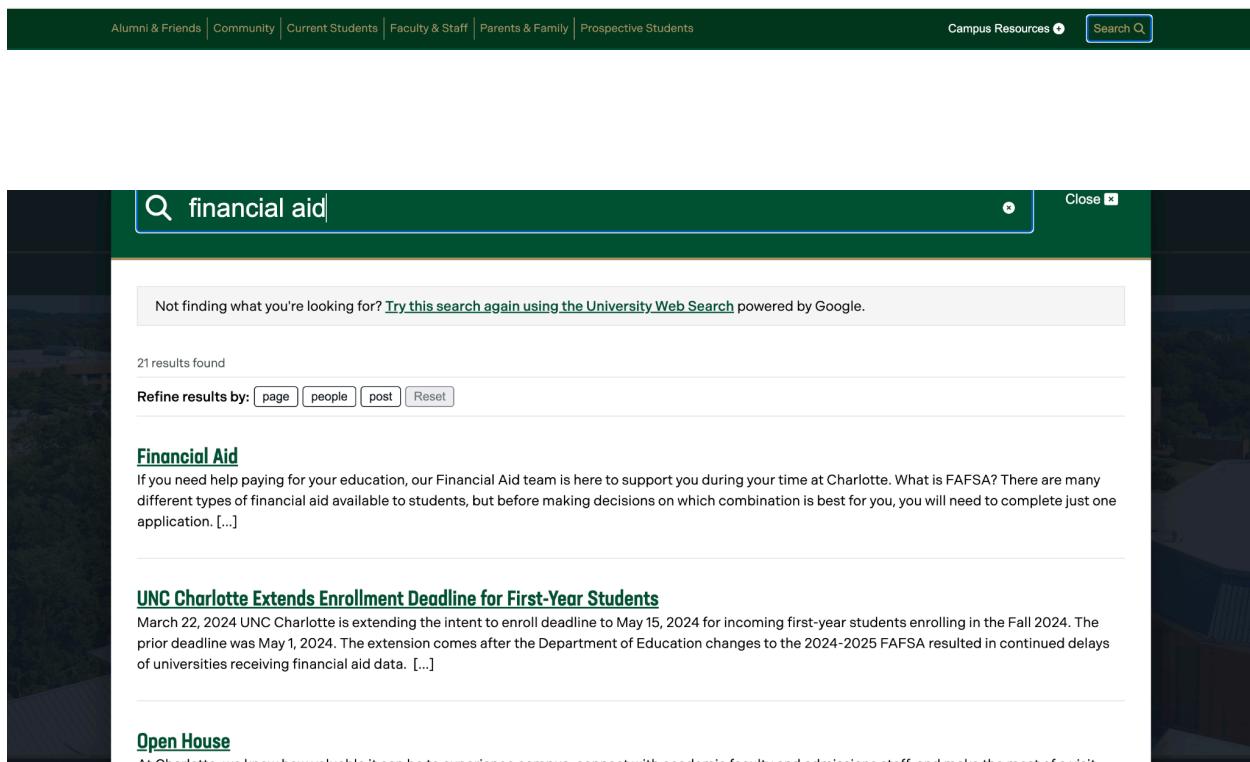
The page's filter functionalities need to be re-evaluated to ensure that checkboxes correspond directly to the behaviors on the page. The checkboxes should either directly correlate with list results, or possibly only one click of an "Apply Filters" button, to execute the task.

4) Consistency & Standards

Our interactions with websites help us gain an understanding of what certain actions will produce. According to this heuristic, users shouldn't wonder whether different actions will do or mean the same thing.

Successful Example

Across all pages we examined, a “Search” bar is provided across the top of the page. This bar allows the user to search the entire UNCC site according to the criteria they enter. This not only is a standard function, located in a standard spot on the pages, but it also is consistent across all pages we examined. This is a good example of this heuristic.



Unsuccessful Example

Links embedded in text, as most users know them, are bolded, underlined and will take them to a separate page or website. We discovered that this is not the case on the Professional Studies Program page. Here, text that indicates links are applying filters to the results. This is completely against consistency and goes as far as to violate standards.

This is before I click the link:

Talking: Swapn Shah

PROGRAMS

Whether you're hoping to pursue [professional development courses](#), complete your [bachelor's degree](#), work toward your [master's](#) or even [doctoral degree](#), UNC Charlotte School of Professional Studies has programs to meet you where you are in your career and your life.

Are you looking for a program that is 100% online? [Find all our online programs here »](#)

PROGRAM TYPE

- Bachelor's
- Boot Camp
- Doctoral
- Graduate Certificate
- Master's
- Professional Credit

Academically or Intellectually Gifted (AIG), Graduate Certificate

Cato College of Education

PROGRAM TYPE

Graduate Certificate

LOCATION

Online

This is what happens after:

PROGRAMS

Talking:

Whether you're hoping to pursue [professional development courses](#), complete your [bachelor's degree](#), work toward your [master's](#) or even [doctoral degree](#), UNC Charlotte School of Professional Studies has programs to meet you where you are in your career and your life.

Are you looking for a program that is 100% online? [Find all our online programs here »](#)

PROGRAM TYPE

- Bachelor's
- Boot Camp
- Doctoral
- Graduate Certificate
- Master's
- Professional Credit

FILTERED BY:

Bachelor of Social Work, B.S.W.

College of Health and Human Services

PROGRAM TYPE

Bachelor's

LOCATION

Online

LOCATION TYPE

Recommendation

The website administrators have two options here. They can either adjust the functionality so links operate as they should and direct the user to another page, or they can remove them altogether and keep the filtering activities for the filtering checkboxes/buttons.

5) Error Prevention

This principle highlights the importance of minimizing the risk of user errors and preventing error-prone conditions.

Successful Example

We discovered that, upon encountering an error page from the Hurricane Relief link (the Undergraduate Admissions page), users can report the error. Though this is an error on behalf of the page administrator (UNCC), providing the option to report helps minimize the impact of errors on the user and allows them back out, while also being able to collect the information and address it as to avoid it.

SUBMIT A 404

Error Information (*Required)

Problem Page *
https://admissions.charlotte.edu/hurricane-helene-impact/
This is the page that shows the error.

Referring Page *
https://admissions.charlotte.edu/apply/
This is the page that took you to the Problem page.

Note/Details

Report This Error

Unsuccessful Example

When the user is entering the query to search for a program, the Professional Studies program site is not able to show the corresponding programs available in real time. Instead, it's showing all possible programs and not tailoring the results. This suggests the keyword search function is not working as it should. This violates the error prevention principle as the user is unable to view their choice of program and they may click on the wrong information.

The image displays two side-by-side screenshots of a website's program search interface. Both screenshots feature a header with the word "PROGRAMS" and a sub-header encouraging users to pursue professional development courses or degrees.

Left Screenshot (Search for 'business'):

- A yellow callout box asks if the user is looking for a 100% online program, with a link to "Find all our online programs here »".
- A search bar contains the text "business".
- A "Search" button and a "Reset" button are adjacent to the search bar.
- A sidebar titled "PROGRAM TYPE" lists categories: Bachelor's, Boot Camp, Doctoral, Graduate Certificate, Master's, and Professional Credit. Buttons for "Apply" and "Clear" filters are at the bottom.
- The main content area shows a single program result:
 - Academically or Intellectually Gifted (AIG), Graduate Certificate** (Cato College of Education)
 - PROGRAM TYPE**: Graduate Certificate
 - LOCATION**: Online
- A "EXPLORE PROGRAM" button is located next to the program title.

Right Screenshot (Search for 'business science'):

- A yellow callout box asks if the user is looking for a 100% online program, with a link to "Find all our online programs here »".
- A search bar contains the text "business science".
- A "Search" button and a "Reset" button are adjacent to the search bar.
- A sidebar titled "PROGRAM TYPE" lists categories: Bachelor's, Boot Camp, Doctoral, Graduate Certificate, Master's, and Professional Credit. A message "No programs found." is displayed.

Recommendations

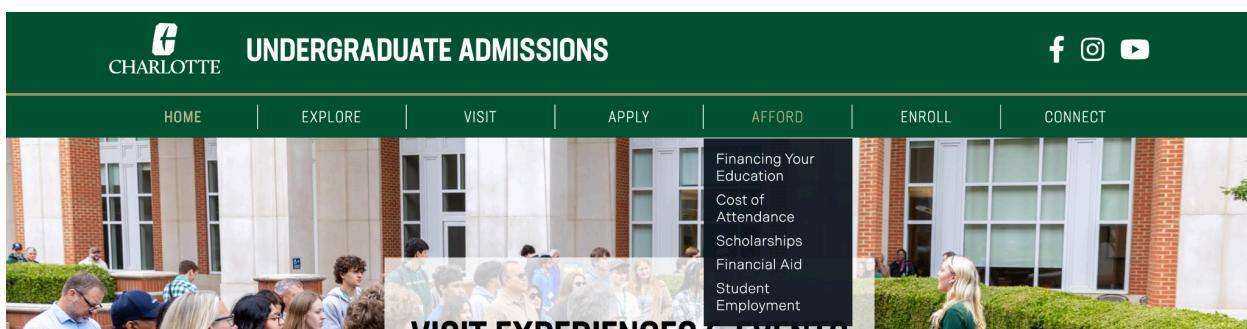
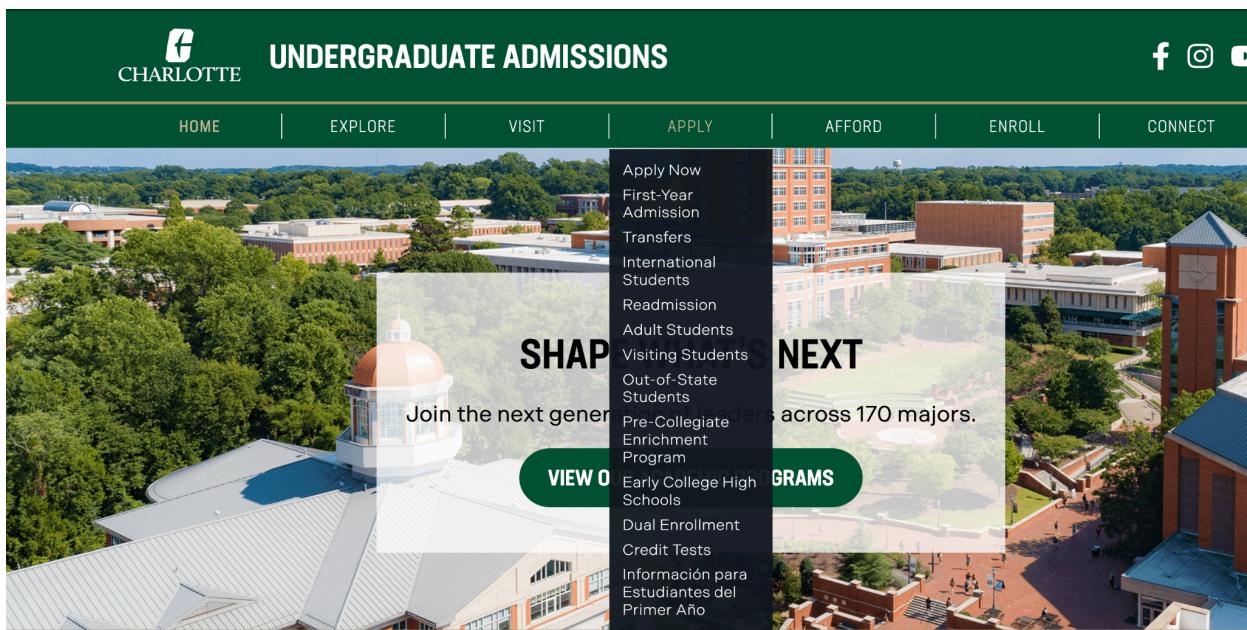
To improve this, the administrator of the site should ensure the keyword search functionality is working correctly. This ensures users get the results they are looking for, reducing the risk of them stumbling across the wrong content erroneously.

6) Recognition rather than Recall

Ability to present all the information in an intuitive manner that reduces users' cognitive stress and the need to remember information.

Successful Example

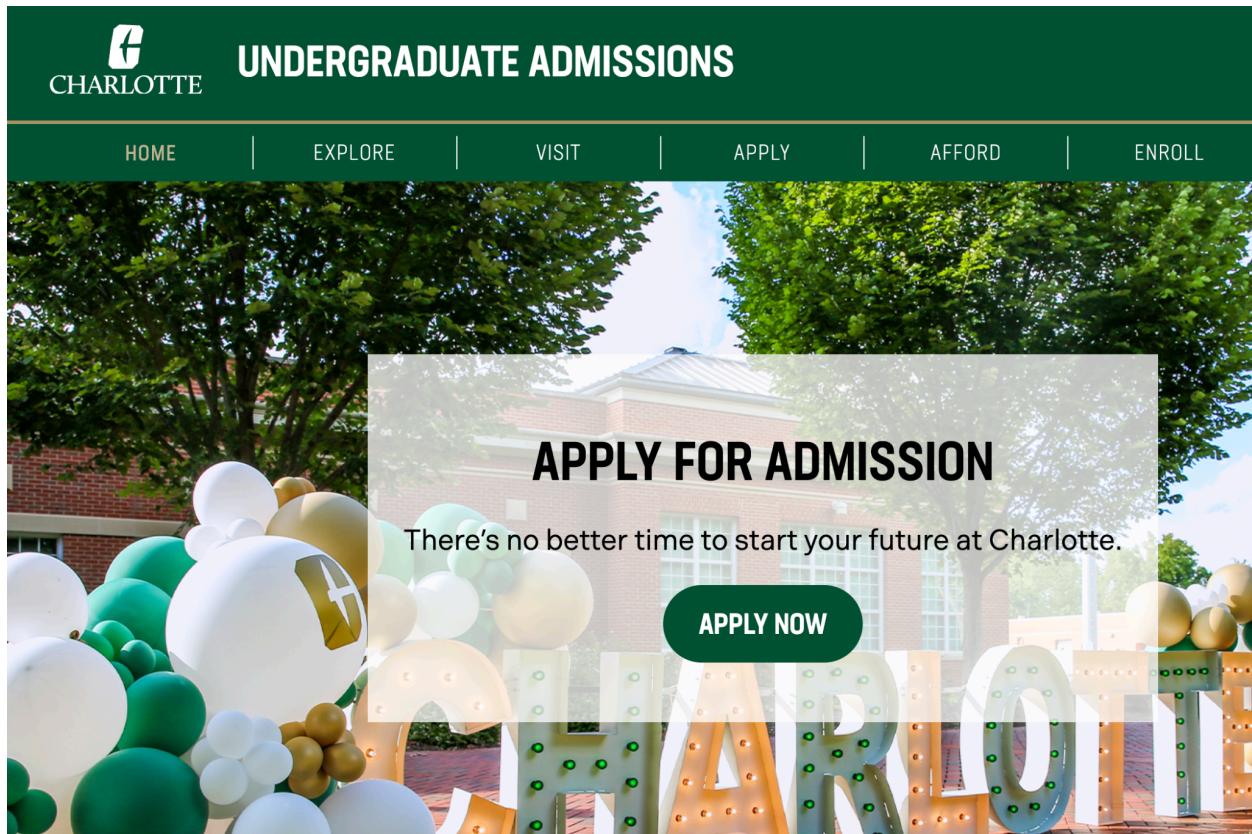
We observed that, across all pages, the site offers the same style of menu bar that provides critical navigation options for the user. Its look and functionality stays consistent throughout the pages we examined and provides corresponding links to web page content.



Unsuccessful Example

There is inconsistent use of buttons vs. menu bars to navigate the pages on the Undergraduate Admissions site. To reach a page, you can click either the button, such as "Apply Now", OR reach the same page by clicking from the menu bar above. However, to return, you can only use the menu bar. Having conflicting ways of

navigating the site forces the user to rely on recall and not recognition (i.e., button takes you forward to a new page, but buttons don't take you back)



Recommendation

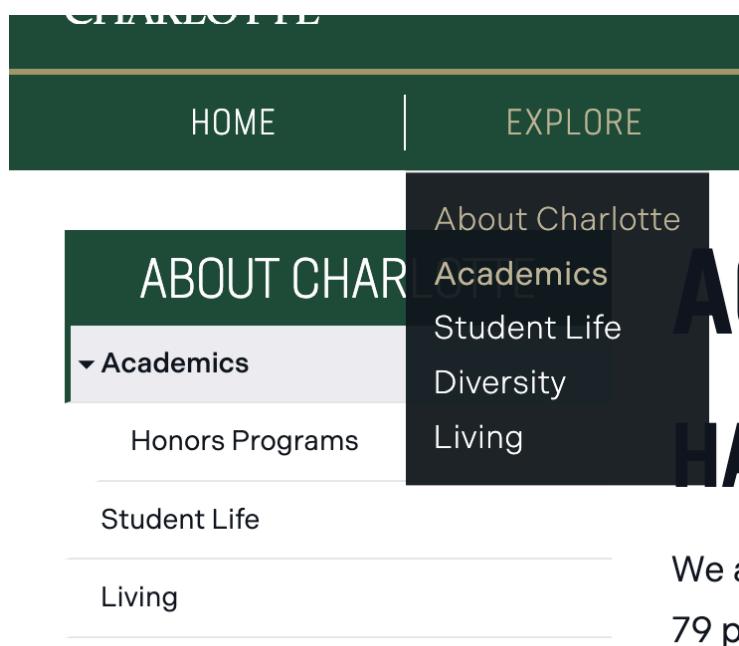
The site should provide options, both in the menu bar and in button format, to go between site pages. Buttons are used very consistently to proceed to another page, but not to return. The navigation menu, however, does both. This does not allow you to recognize the use of buttons as a viable tool for navigation and makes it harder to navigate the site instinctively.

7) Flexibility and Efficiency of Use

This refers to shortcuts that help enable or speed up user interactions by ensuring processes can be carried out in different ways, allowing the user to pick whichever method works best for them.

Successful Example

On each page examined, users are given the option to navigate pages based on the use of dropdown menus or the left sidebar. They can pick which way works best for them.



Unsuccessful Example

A returning user still has to click “Apply with the future 49er Application” to be able to continue an application they’ve already started. This doesn’t allow for much flexibility to manipulate the site differently according to your needs.

2 Ways to Apply for Admission

Choose from the **Future 49er Application or the Common App** to apply to Charlotte.

APPLY WITH THE FUTURE 49ER APPLICATION

APPLY WITH THE COMMON APP

Clicking the above brings you to a page with the options below:

APPLICATION MANAGEMENT

RETURNING USERS:

If you have recently applied and paid your application fee, please allow up to 30 minutes for your application status to change from "awaiting payment" to "submitted."

[Log in](#)

FIRST-TIME USERS:

[Create an account](#) to start a new application.

Recommendation

The site should provide a “continue application” button directly alongside options to apply to give the users flexibility if they’ve already started an application.

8) Aesthetic and Minimalist Design

This heuristic states that pages should not contain irrelevant or unneeded information. It states that every extra unit of irrelevant information then competes with relevant units and diminishes their viability.

Successful Example

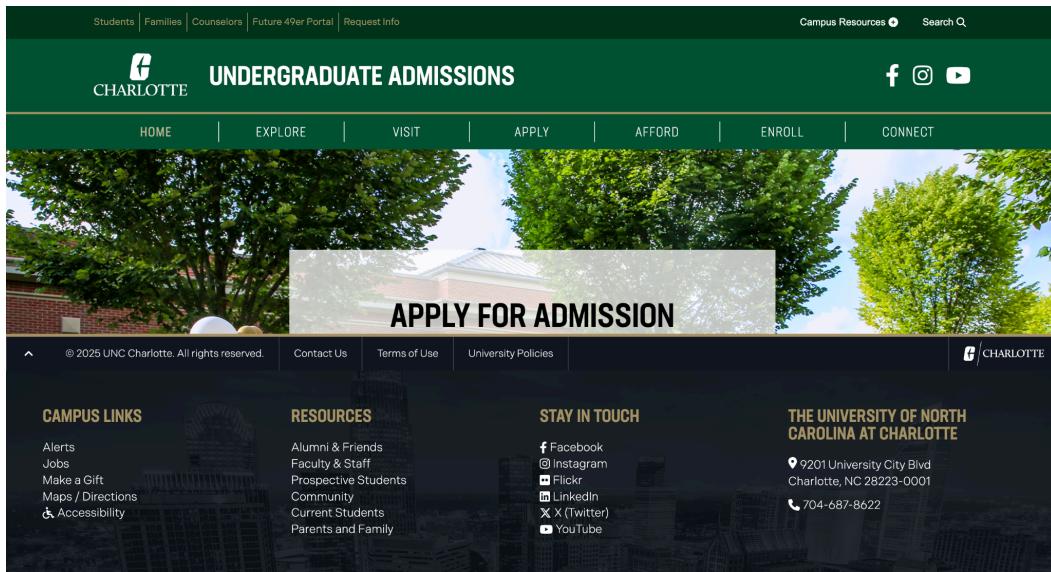
On the School of Professional Studies page, news and feature information is relayed considering only the most important units for the user. It provides the title, which can be clicked on to expand the article, a small, simple image and a date. This is in alignment with this heuristic as it ensures all units of information provided are necessary and relevant.

NEWS & FEATURES

 <p>CHARLOTTE RANKS NO. 3 IN NATION FOR ONLINE BACHELOR'S DEGREES January 21, 2025</p>	 <p>YEAR IN REVIEW 2024 January 1, 2025</p>	 <p>BACK TO SCHOOL AND WORK: AMAZON'S CAREER CHOICE PROGRAM AT UNC CHARLOTTE FULFILLS NEED FOR UPSKILLING October 1, 2024</p>	 <p>JEFF JONES APPOINTED DIRECTOR OF STRATEGIC WORKFORCE ENGAGEMENT AT UNC CHARLOTTE'S SCHOOL OF PROFESSIONAL STUDIES August 8, 2024</p>
 <p>ONRAMP TO CHARLOTTE ONLINE EXPANDS TRANSFER OPTIONS FOR STANLY AND</p>	 <p>CHARLOTTE ONLINE GRADUATE PROGRAMS RECOGNIZED IN NATIONAL</p>	 <p>CHARLOTTE RANKS NO. 7 IN NATION FOR ONLINE BACHELOR'S DEGREES</p>	 <p>ONLINE LEARNING SYMPOSIUM December 14, 2023</p>

Unsuccessful Example

Across all pages examined, the footer contains too many unnecessary links. This leads to a sense of “cognitive overload” for the user. The footer also overlaps with the main screen significantly, which blocks some of the information presented, using up much space for limited value.



Recommendations

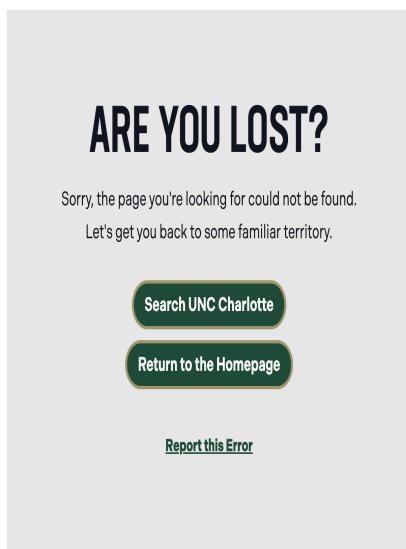
The website administrator should review the functionality of the bottom menu bar as interactions with it have limited value to the user for the amount of space it takes up. This conflicts with the idea of minimalism.

9) Help Users Recognize, Diagnose, and Recover from Errors

This heuristic emphasizes the user of clear language which precisely indicates the problem and suggests a course of action for the user. Compliance avoids using error codes.

Successful Example

When on the Undergraduate Admissions page, when clicking on the Hurricane Relief link, we encountered an error. However, instead of using Error 404, it presented us (the users) with options to proceed, such as “Search UNC Charlotte” and “Return to the Homepage”. This is a good example of this heuristic.

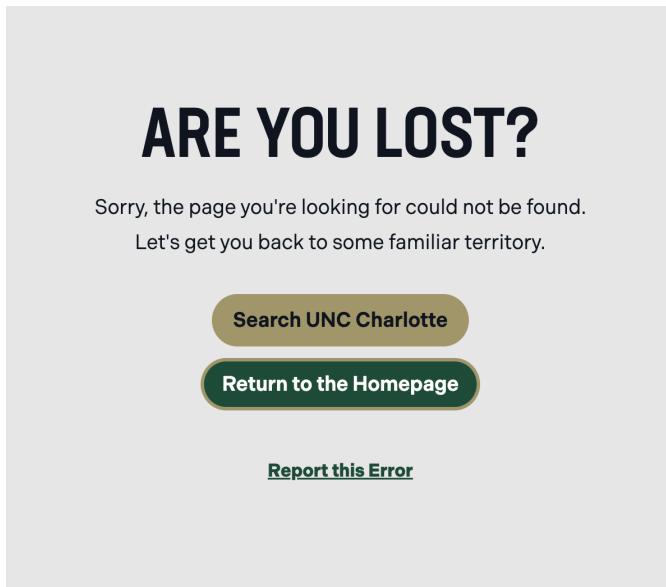


SUBMIT A 404

Error Information (*Required)	
Problem Page *	<input type="text" value="https://admissions.charlotte.edu/hurricane-helene-impact/"/>
This is the page that shows the error.	
Referring Page *	<input type="text" value="https://admissions.charlotte.edu/apply/"/>
This is the page that took you to the Problem page.	
Note/Details	
<input type="text"/>	
<input type="button" value="Report This Error"/>	

Unsuccessful Examples

As previously mentioned as part of system visibility, the error messages encountered don't provide any context about recovery. Though there are some recovery options, such as a "Search UNC Charlotte" button, the site could very easily suggest similar links to the user to help them locate the information they're looking for more effectively.



WEBSITE SEARCH

Recommendations

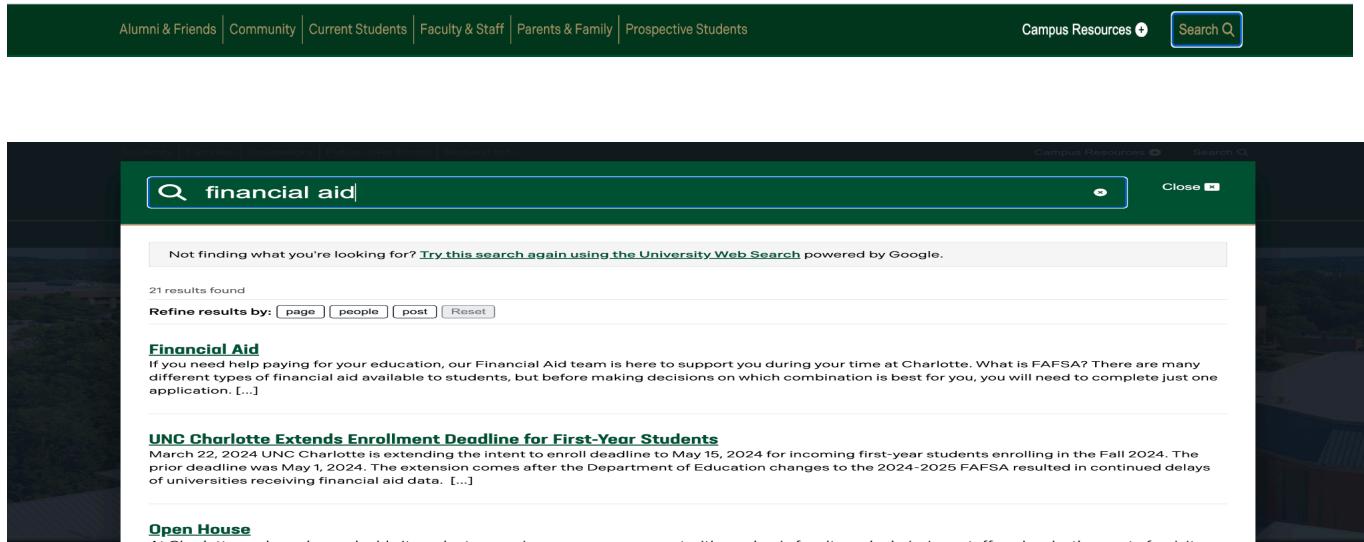
Instead of just leaving the recovery in the hands of the user, the site could very well recommend similar links based on the criteria that led the user to this page.

10) Help and Documentation

It is necessary to provide good and well-structured help documentation to ensure the user gets support when they are lost.

Successful Example

If a user cannot find the relevant page, a user can use the search function to help them locate the information they need. Every webpage we examined for this exercise had a search button at the right side of the header, which helps perform this search of UNCC's pages.



Unsuccessful Example

No FAQ section to provide clear information about common inquiries. FAQ section should cover all the common inquiries about the respective webpage user is trying to get assistance for.



Recommendations

There should be a clear and accessible FAQ section to help users address their issues and concerns efficiently. Providing contact details is not enough and does not satisfy this criteria.