

Unit 2 Assignment 1: Website Evaluation

I. General Information

URLs of sites evaluated: (1) www.bestcolleges.com, (2) www.collegesimply.com

Authors of sites evaluated: Both are authored by their respective companies (no information about individual authors is given)

Evaluator's first name: Marcell

II. Web sites were evaluated on the following system

Type of computer: Mac running OS X Yosemite, 1.7 GHz Intel Core i5, 4 GB 1600 MHz DDR3, Intel HD Graphics 4000 1024 MB

Browser: Google Chrome

Internet connection: Wireless Connection

III. Text Summary (500-750 words)

The two websites that I evaluated were www.bestcolleges.com and www.collegesimply.com. I chose these two sites because they contain similar content as what I want to include in my final project. My project website will have three areas of content included: 1) information about two- and four-year institutions in the area, 2) scholarship information, and 3) information about community organizations that can help secondary students prepare for higher education. The first website has information about the first two and the second website contains information about the first area only.

Both of the sites feature extensive search functions that visitors can use to narrow down results from relevant databases. On www.bestcolleges.com, this is seen in the "Search our Database" section. This database lists thousands of higher education institutions across the country, and site users can narrow down the results by geographic area, type of degree, intended major/field of study, and even by public or private status. Under the "Financial Aid" tab of the navigation menu on this site, users can explore options by demographic, interests, major, grade point average and more. On www.collegesimply.com, we see the search functions in the "Find Colleges" tab, where users can search for colleges by state and then by city/town, and results will be listed by distance from the specified location. The search functions are the main similarity between the two sites. The main difference is that on www.collegesimply.com, the overall organization of content is not as easy-to-follow as it is on www.bestcolleges.com. The latter site groups together all of the content, using a horizontal navigation bar at the top of the page while you have to go deeper into each page on the former site to access all of the different types of content.

The biggest strength of www.bestcolleges.com is the "Search our Database" feature. As mentioned before, this page, which is accessible from the main navigation toolbar on the site, allows users to narrow down college options by a number of different factors. This could be very useful for a student who knows exactly what type of higher education experience they are looking for/interested in. The biggest weakness of this site is that there

are not dropdown items from the main menu for the “Financial Aid”, “Resources”, and “Careers” tabs. This could be useful, as it would allow users to get a glimpse of what each section includes without having to actually navigate to it (they have a dropdown menu for the “Rankings” section and it definitely improves usability).

The biggest strength of www.collegesimply.com is that it is easy to use the “Find Colleges” function. The site gives students multiple factors to use in finding colleges, and the design of the page is such that it is simple and easy for students to navigate back and forth between different searches. The biggest weakness of the site, however, is that the overall website organization is somewhat inconsistent. For example, the links to content in the footnotes do not clearly correspond with the links to content in the main navigation bar.

The first use case that I will discuss is that of a high school junior visiting www.bestcolleges.com to search for scholarship opportunities. The student would navigate to the “Financial Aid” page from the homepage using the main horizontal navigation bar at the top of the page. From there, the student would scroll down to the “College Scholarship Database” section and enter his or her information into the form that is used to narrow results. The results would then be filtered and the students could browse the matching scholarships accordingly. One potential criticism is that the user has to scroll down to reach the database; however, I think that the website developer avoided an issue here by including a link to the database at the very top of the “Financial Aid” page.

The second use case that I will discuss is that of a high school junior visiting www.collegesimply.com to search for schools that match his/her grade point average. From the homepage, the student would click “Find Colleges” and then “By GPA.” The student would then enter his/her GPA and would be given a list of matching schools. While this is a useful function, it is inconsistent that the site has search by test score options available on the homepage, but not search by GPA or any other factor.

IV. Peer Feedback (includes comments received by 06/13/17)

Comment #1 (Amanda):

I LOVE the design of bestcolleges.com. It is extremely simple and sleek, very easy to read and navigate, and all of the information a potential college student could want is 1 or 2 clicks away. I didn't dive too much into the search engine tool like you did, but I can see where this tool would provide a student with unlimited resources. The farther I dig into their site, the more I like their design. Each page is different but follows the same design rules and style. I couldn't agree more with you about the layout of collegesimply.com. I like the concept of simple searches, but I don't like the design (may be personal preference?). Also, I don't usually have trouble with my internet, but this page took a while to load as I clicked through the sites. I couldn't find a reasoning behind the time it took, but it definitely did not load as fast as bestcolleges.com. Too many people give up quickly on searches these days to have a page that loads slowly. Thanks for sharing!

Comment #2 (Valerie):

Wow! I am really impressed with the design of bestcolleges.com! It is very easy to navigate and the design is incredibly sleek looking. I wish I could make my own website look like this! Not only is the layout awesome, but it is a really fun tool to use! I am a school counselor and I have never used this site but it has very unique fun lists that students would enjoy. For instance, I love the lists of colleges you can find under student life where students can view lists that range from best colleges for LGBTQ students to best colleges for students with no cars. That is a very fun and interactive way to get students to start exploring their options. I also liked collegesimply in that they can narrow their search by entering in their own test scores so that they have a more realistic idea of where they might get in. Combining these two websites into one would be an awesome tool for students to use.