

Competitive User Research

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Goal: Evaluating the effectiveness of the University of Florida website's communication regarding the impact of Covid-19 for the 2020 academic year.

University of Florida Competitors: The first step in the competitive research for user experience is to identify and profile the competition (Goodman, Kuniavsky, & Moed, 2012). I started by searching the internet using keywords such as “University of Florida vs”, “Best universities in the USA” and as I was scrolling through University of Florida’s website I saw the article about the top 10 universities and how UF is striving to be in the top 5 of that list. Therefore, I concluded that the Universities listed on that list adjacent to University of Florida are two of UF’s competitors. All three are public research universities that are national ranked schools.

1. University of Virginia: Is a public research university that provides higher education and is a nationally ranked school.
2. University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill: Is a public research university that is considered to be a public institution which offers an academic experience equivalent to an Ivy league University.

User Types: After researching all three websites, based on their messaging and visual designs, my conclusion is that the top three users the three websites are trying to target are as follows:

1. Perspective Students
2. Current Students
3. Donors/Funding

Ways Covid-19 is communicated to the user types by site:

1. **University of Florida:** UF’s website has Covid-19 information in three different places on the homepage, targeting current students, staff and visitors:

- Provides Campus guidelines for current on campus students or seems that way based on the way its worded, once clicked on it also mentions that the information also relates to staff and visitors.
- They have included a case dashboard and quarantine information that targets on campus students, staff and visitors.
- A link to campus health requirements that targets anyone that physically goes on campus, this targets the current students, and any visitors as well as any perspective students that want to visit the campus.

Advantages: UF has a fixed panel with a Covid 19 title that also has a signifier at the top of the homepage and it also has two more sections about Covid 19 on the homepage targeting staff and students with the use of visuals and eye-catching design.

Hindrances: The Covid-19 information targets mostly students and not donors which is one of their key users. In addition, the top panel that has the Covid-19 information is not clickable unless the user clicks on two specific areas, making it a little difficult for the user to get to the information.

Design supporting Covid-19: The design includes a panel at the top of the homepage with a signifier showing this is an important message, targeting current students that are on campus, this panel is also frozen/fixed so that when you scroll down it can still be seen. Another design attribute is that when the user scrolls over this tab it turns another color to get the users attention.

2. University of Virginia: University of Virginia's home page has Covid-19 listed only once on the homepage where you click on for more information:

- Once you click for more information, they communicate that the information on this page is for everyone that returns to campus, they do this by using pictures and a phrase: "Be Safe for all of us".
- Through pictures and words, they have categorized the sections to target staff and students.

Advantages: The design in the Covid-19 information page is very visually pleasing and it effectively communicates that Covid-19 affects everyone, staff, athletes, students, visitors etc. therefore targeting all the key users. The design triggers an emotional reaction, therefore making it memorable. "Memories last far longer than the immediate experience or the period of usage, which are the domains of the visceral and behavioral levels. It is reflection that drives us to recommend a product, to recommend that others use it—or perhaps to avoid it." (Norman, 2013, p. 25)

Hindrances: The tab that lists Covid-19 is halfway down the homepage and it doesn't have any signifiers showing the importance of this information. In addition, the color of the tab design is similar to many other tab options on the homepage therefore it can easily be missed.

Design supporting Covid-19: The Covid-19 information is noted on the homepage halfway down the middle with a tab that has a dark background and big white font stating "Fall 2020 Covid Information". Noteworthy for this site is that once you click on this tab, the Covid information page is very impactful, using images and keywords to convey the message to users such as students and staff.

3. University of North Carolina- Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina has a Covid section highlighted midway down the homepage with clearly titled resources:

- It targets funders/donors through specific tabs in that section.
- It also targets students through a specific tab in that section.
- It has a tab title Carolina together- a road map, which when you click on it, targets students and staff.

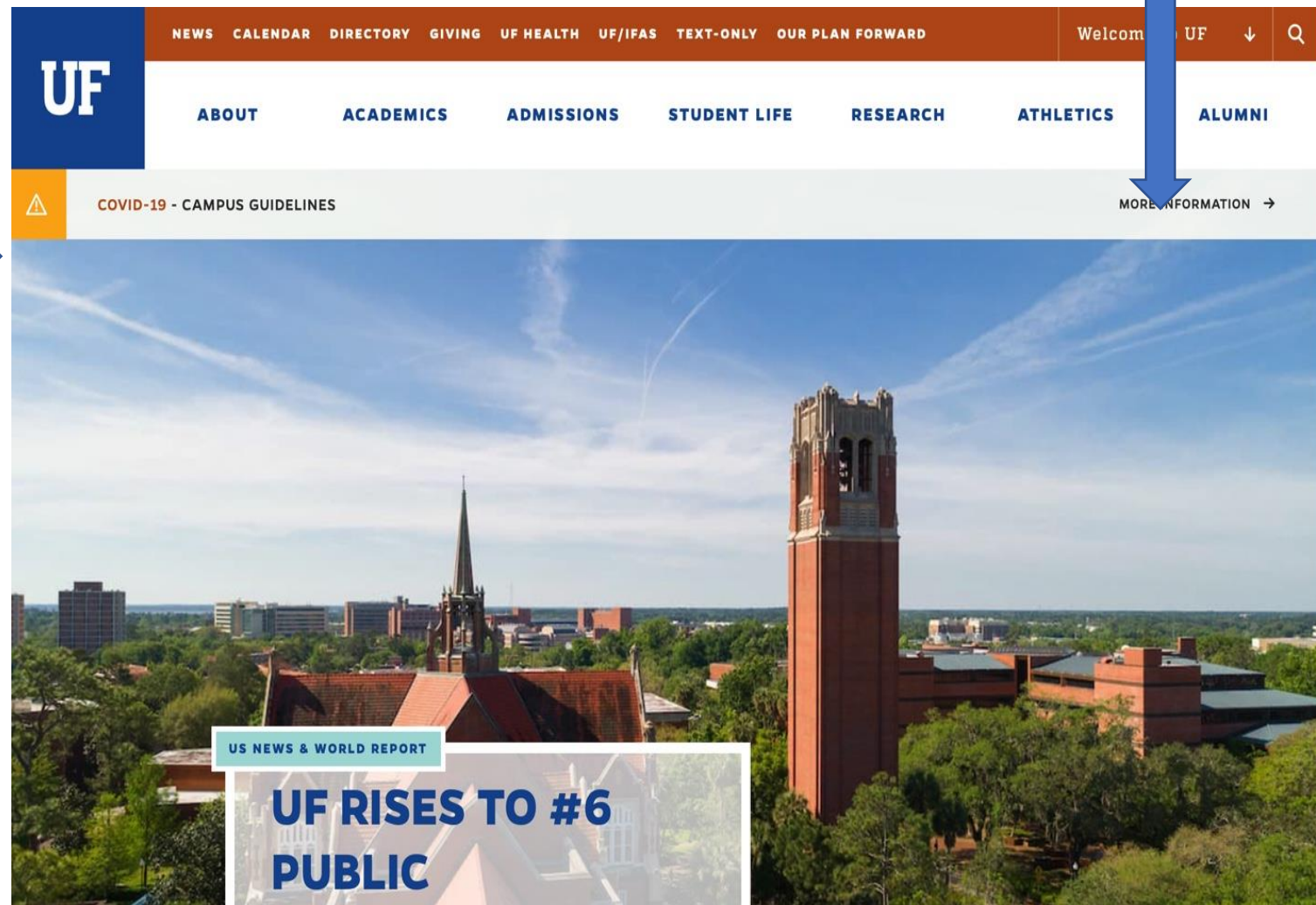
Advantages: Targets specific users by having clear titles in the Covid section, i.e. students and funders.

Hindrances: The Covid19 information is more than halfway down the homepage and therefore can be missed if the user clicks away from homepage by using one of the options provided on the top of the page.

Design supporting Covid-19: Halfway down the homepage a dark image with white big font stating "Covid 19 Resources" with specific tabs in white underneath it, it is visually eye catching.

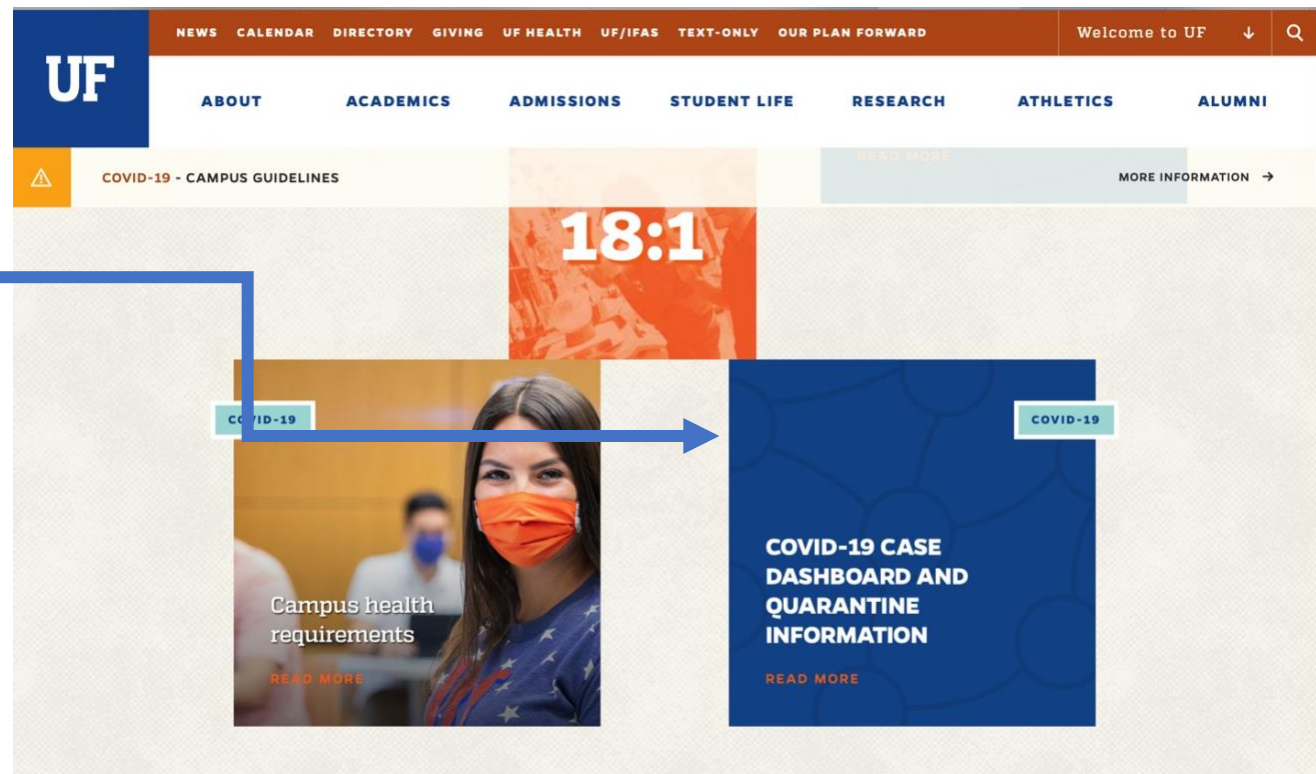
Three Design Recommendations to improve the UF site for Covid-19 information:

I would suggest making the entire Covid-19 tab clickable, so the user can click anywhere on the tab, rather than just being clickable when user clicks on more information or the signifier (warning button on left of tab).

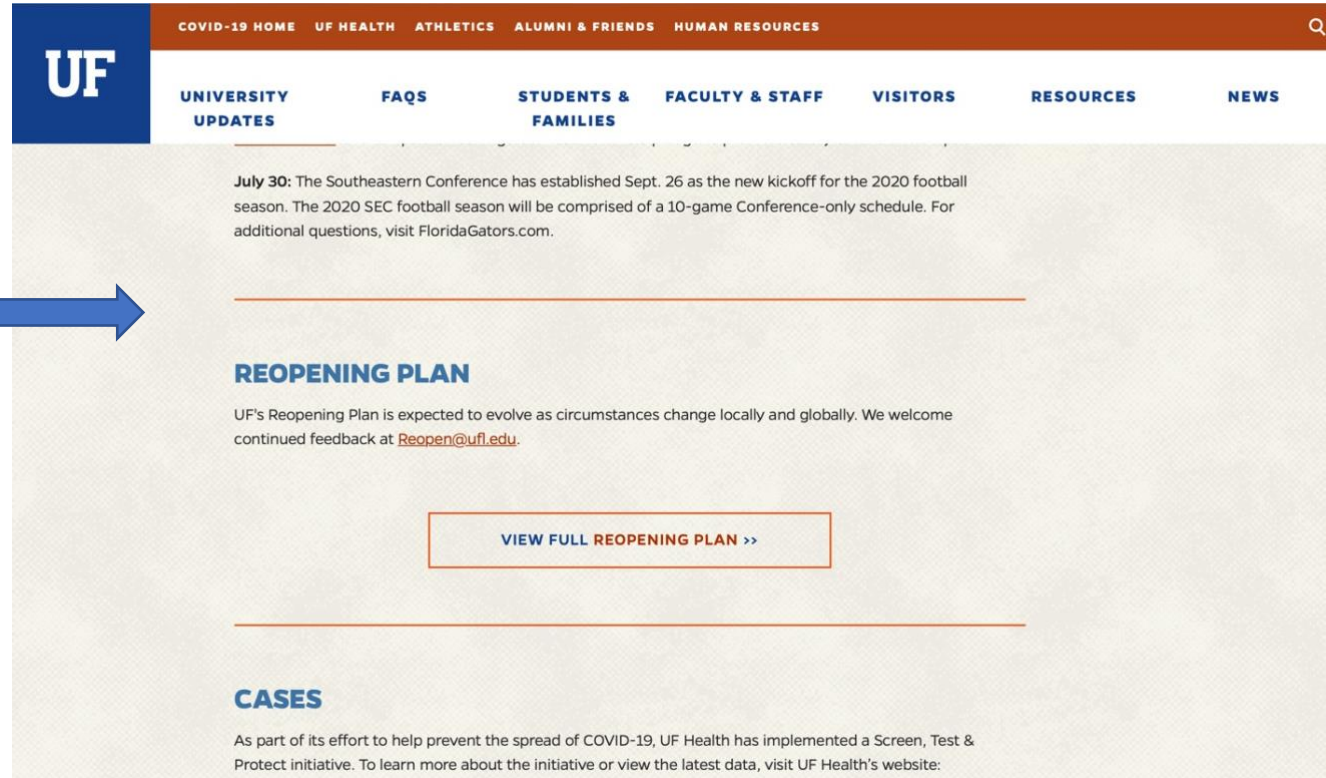


I suggest rewording this top panel to say "Covid- 19 Information" instead of "Covid-19 Campus guidelines" so that it is clearer to the user that this is the section to go to about general Covid information even if you're not a current on campus student. The current wording makes it sound as if the information linked here is only for students on campus which is mis-leading to the other users such as visitors and staff.

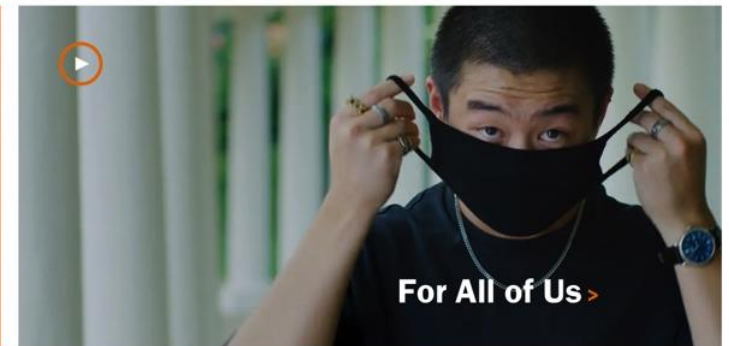
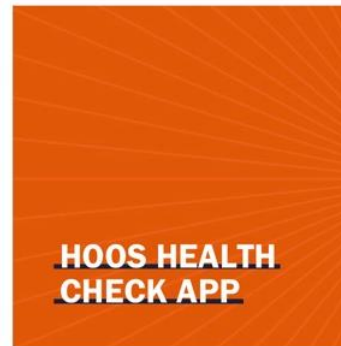
I would suggest taking this section off the homepage as this information is already included in the Covid-19 information page linked at the top of the homepage. This would assist in highlighting the campus health requirement rather than splitting the attention of user to two different information sections about Covid-19.



The information on the Covid-19 page is lengthy with not enough visuals and not categorized well. I would suggest categorizing by user and adding clickable visuals similar to the design in the University of Virginia website below, i.e. categorizing it by recent announcements, reopening plan, and Covid-19 cases etc. and using clickable visuals that are titled specifically to target each user.



I recommend University of Florida to adapt a similar style in their Covid-19 information page so that the information is better organized, visually appealing and clearly targeting the specific user types they are trying to address.



References

- Norman, D (2013). *The Design of Everyday Things*. (eBook edition). Basic Books. <https://ufl.skillport.com/skillportfe/main.action?assetid=59487>> (Accessed September 19, 2020)
- Goodman E., Kuniavski, M., & Moed, A. (2012). *Observing the user experience* (2nd ed.). Morgan Kauffmann.