

Robert Scott Lake
IT 345
Dr. Murphy
October 3, 2015

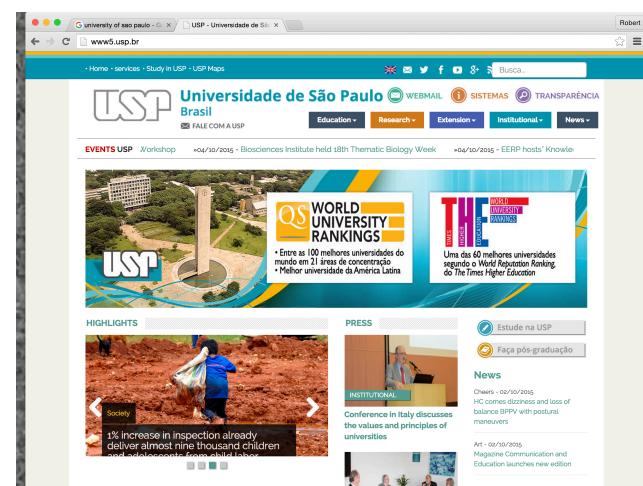
Effect of Culture on Academic Websites: Brazil

This report will evaluate three Brazilian universities' websites using the Marcus Model of Usability and compare and contrast them with each other and with Marymount University's website.

The first website examined is Universidad de São Paulo (USP) is a public university maintained by the state of São Paulo. It is one of the largest educational institutions in Brazil and has ranked high in numerous academic rankings (<http://www5.usp.br/>). There are around 100,000 students enrolled in the numerous undergraduate and professional degree programs.

From first look at the website, in the top left corner is USP's symbol with the name of the university beside it. Directly under the university name beginning about centered in the page is a set of horizontal dropdown navigational menus of ease of navigation. Directly below spanning the entire page, a scrolling marque announces campus news and events. Below is a picture of the university's campus worked into a banner containing the school's international status according to two ranking organizations. It then continues with university highlights, press releases and a couple of quick navigation choices for prospective students.

At initial impression the website seems as if it is a news agency and not a university. The page feels very cluttered and busy grabbing one's attention from all sides with no real focus. Yes, as one scrolls down the site is segregated into departments; however, there is perhaps too much information that can be better presented on its own section of the university's website. They have sacrificed clarity and cohesion for a want to provide as much information as possible on the home page. Navigation is consistent through out the site using the same menu on all pages and adding an expanded menu on the right hand side of the page on subsequent pages from home. There is no immediate impression that this is a culturally different site than other western websites.

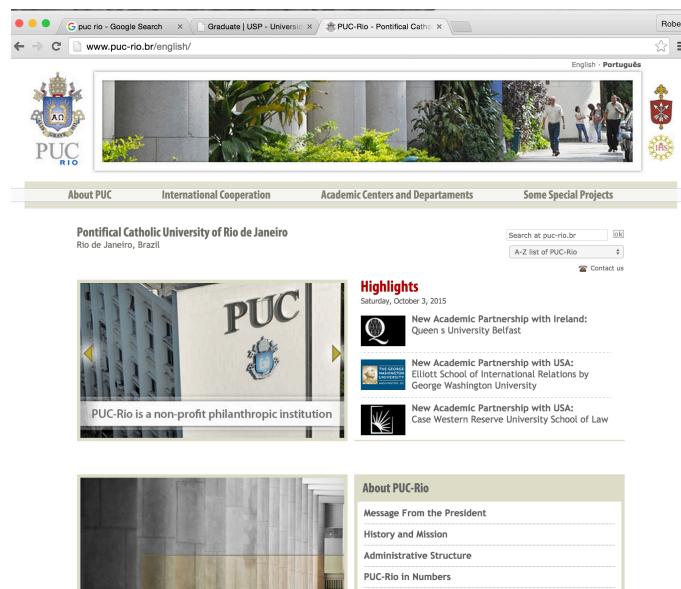


The next university examined is Pontifical Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro (PUC) (<http://www.puc-rio.br/english/>). PUC was the first private higher education institution established in Brazil created by the Catholic Church. It was founded in 1940 and is operated under the supervision of the Society of Jesus. PUC student demographics are as follows: undergraduate 12,516; graduate 2,566 and total number of faculty members 2013.

The first impression of PUC's website is that of a place of higher learning. On the top left and right corners are the university's coats of arms and branding book ending a banner that contains a slide show of different scenes of the campus. The colors of the layout are consistent and the page is organized with a clear mental model that is intuitive. The navigation bar directly under the university branding spans the entire page and is simple to understand. Those menu options are repeated down the page with an expanded menu communicating enough information that a novice user would understand and be directed towards the appropriate page on the PUC website. Even if the page came up in Portuguese, a user would be able to tell directly that this was an institution of higher learning and most likely be able to navigate without too much difficulty. This site makes excellent use of white space with the layout arranged in such a way that one's eye glides smoothly through it without feeling overpowered.

The final university under scrutiny, Pontifícia Universidade Católica de Rio Grande do Sul (PUCRS) (<http://www.pucrs.br/portal/?p=en>). PUCRS is "a Marist university of excellence, aimed at the comprehensive education of our students, in their religious, humanistic, scientific, professional and citizen dimensions..." founded in 1948. Enrollment in 2012 was 30,567 students and located in Porto Alegre, the southernmost capital of Brazil. PUCRS prides itself in scientific research and innovation consolidating itself to be among the leaders.

PUCRS begins its website with its coat of arms and name in the upper left corner of the page that acts as a home icon upon a blue background. As the eye moves to the right there is a simple horizontal row of five navigation icons, which share the blue background as the PUCRS brand. This banner is consistent throughout the website. Below is a slideshow of pertinent pictures of views of the campus and campus life. Below the slideshow are icons that reflect the five options in the navigation bar and adding three other sites links, such as



publications, directions and a campus map and a link to the research and innovation webpage.

PUCRS is another good example of design cohesion. It conveys who they are as an institution of higher learning through well designed, intuitive and simple navigation icons that give the right amount of information without overpowering the user. Each subsequent page, as stated above, has the banner with the navigation bar at the top of the page and adding a navigation bar specific to that department or section of the university. The interaction and behavior of the system is congruent with a quality product and experience. Colors are consistent throughout.

These three universities, one public and two private Catholic, are in themselves interesting and unique. It is intriguing that the university with the most students and a government backed public institution has the most disorganized website out of the three especially for the ostentatious display of its “international prestige”. One would think that an internationally recognized school should have greater ability to showcase itself with a more simplified yet informational website. USP’s website is not in the least bit impressive and is in desperate need of redesigning. It truly felt if it were some sort of tabloid magazine’s website.

Both PUC and PUCRS are intuitive, easy to use, and are not overbearing or overpowering to the senses. Navigating both of their websites is a breeze. The menus are in logical places, buttons portray the right amount of information without clutter or distraction. If one wants greater information it is easily obtained by going to the appropriate page. Both sites had continuity of design. One could truly get a feel for what these universities had to offer their students. In comparison to Marymount University’s website both PUC and PUCRS are comparable, like electronic feng shui. It shows that these universities are serious about providing a complete and comprehensive education that is focused on success.

As for culture, there was no blatant cry of Brazilian culture. All portrayed what seemed western style websites. Marymount, PUC and PUCRS had the best websites and have little need for improvement. PUC has a good start; however they could end the main page after the highlights section prompting users to visit the department specific webpage for information.

