

Library Usability Study Findings & Recommendations

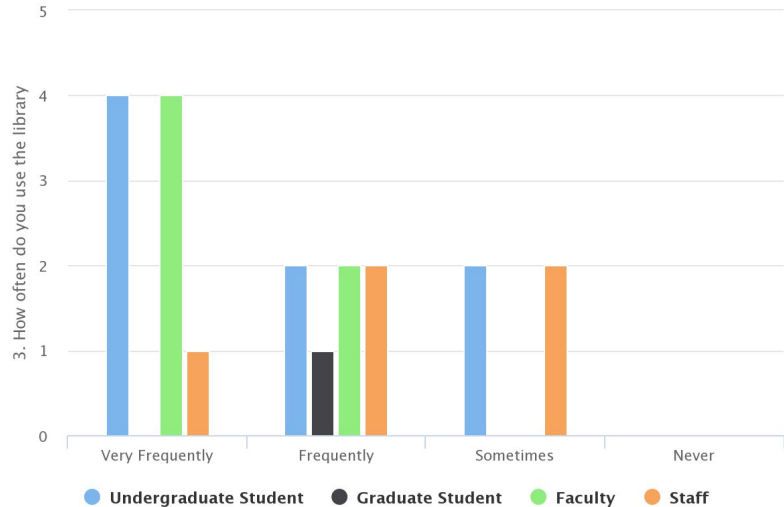
Spring 2020

Study Participant Overview

In Spring 2020 four website usability study sessions were held with a total of 20 participants from the Rhode Island College community. The study participants were comprised of:

- Eight undergraduate students
- Six faculty members
- Five staff members
- One graduate student

Most self identified as frequent library users.



Methods

Each study session was broken into a series of tasks. Tasks were:

- Pre-survey
- Discussion session on what participants look for on the library website, with [concept mapping in Padlet](#)
- Identifying confusing library link, menu and website language
- Discussion session sharing identified language and brainstorming alternates
- Link menu sorting
- Quick Links menu selection
- Discussion session on menu headers and link sorting and quick links
- Post-survey
- Final discussion session

The test website is available here: <https://library.ric.edu/test-website>

Findings and Recommendations

Library Menu/Link Language (For Drop Down Menus)

ABOUT LIBRARY

STUDENTS

FACULTY & STAFF

CONTACT US

Findings

In the second part of the feedback sessions, participants were given an alphabetized list of 40 library homepage or menu links. This list included all current library homepage links and links from all menus one layer deep from the current homepage. Participants were asked to circle any terms they found confusing. Library employees and very confident users also circled terms they knew to be confusing to others, or only understood after using the library for some time. Following this, we discussed what the terms meant, and what each link takes website users to, on the current website.

This phase had three purposes:

1. to discover which library jargon is confusing to users;
2. clarify what the terms meant so that participants could sort them appropriately in the next phase of the session;
3. brainstorm better vocabulary to use in future.

Additionally, students noted that they were more likely to engage with pages and links that included the word "Student" in the menu or link name. Making it clear the collection or service is specifically for them.

Of the 40 terms, nine were **clear** to all participants:

- Course Reserves
- Faculty Publications
- FAQs
- Floor Map
- Hours
- Library Instruction
- New Books & Materials
- Reference and Research
- Technology and Laptop Lending

Only five were **confusing** to 50% or more of the participants:

- Digital Commons - 60%
- Tipasa Interlibrary Loan - 60%
- Liaison Librarians - 55%
- LibGuides - 55%
- Student Scholarship - 50%

Eight were **confusing** to 25% - 45% of the participants:

- Curriculum Corner - 45%
- Chat Help - 40%
- Collection Development - 35%
- Course Guides - 30%
- Employment Opportunities - 30%
- Research Guides - 30%
- Purchase Recommendations - 25%
- Research Help Phone # - 25%

In the following discussion session two trends emerged:

1. terms that were confusing because they were jargon
2. terms that were confusing because of a lack of context in the alphabetized list.

For example, modes of research support seemed duplicative, such as chat and text; LibGuides as a category was confusing on its own, but as a broader umbrella for “course guides” and “subject guides” was clearer. Additionally, participants created further submenus or groupings in the sorting phase, indicating conceptually-like terms. Our recommendations will therefore follow these patterns as well.

Recommendations

Clarifying Jargon

Digital Commons

Because there is a range of content within Digital Commons, brainstorming a new term, among library employees and with users, has been difficult. However, from the discussion sessions it's clear this should be updated both by clarifying the language and by creating a group or context, such as pairing it with “Special Collections” and including collections within Digital Commons in a submenu.

Jargon clarification recommendation: RIC Digital Publications and Archives

Context clarification recommendation: Pair with Special Collections

Tipasa Interlibrary Loan

The clearest single piece of feedback we got throughout the study was the request to remove “Tipasa” from “Tipasa Interlibrary Loan.” If not noted on their sheets, all participants agreed in the discussion sessions that “Tipasa” was not a useful term for them, while they did understand “Interlibrary Loan.” The only additional comment on this was to add “My” to both “Library Account” and Interlibrary Loan Account, to make it feel more personal and to indicate that it will be the user's own information there for both.

Recommendation: Remove “Tipasa” add “My” to both account types to indicate this is not a policy or informational page, but patron account login links.

Liaison Librarians

This term was clear to faculty and represented the reciprocal relationship liaisons have with their department, but was unclear to staff and students.

Recommendation: Use “Liaison Librarian” in the faculty menu and services descriptions and use “Subject Librarians” in the student menu and services descriptions.

Student Scholarship

Students thought this term meant scholarships, not student work. It should also be a term in the “Digital Commons” submenu.

Recommendation: Student Projects

Curriculum Corner

This term is new to the library and an update from “Curriculum Resource Center.” It was not clear to participants that this was a collection as much as it is a space, nor that it is primarily for education majors.

Recommendation: Student Teacher Library

Context Clarification

LibGuides/Course Guides/Research Guides

Because these terms are not used consistently now, some faculty and students already know any one of the three terms. However, we should do more to clarify the relationship between the terms.

Recommendation: To move away from using platform and tool names, but have a menu category, use “Guides” as the category header and use “Course Guides” and “Research Guides” below. Potentially break out other guide types as well.

Collection Development & Purchase Recommendations

Not clear to participants that this is only for faculty.

Recommendation: Ensure it is only listed in the faculty menu.

Employment Opportunities

Not clear to participants that this is only for students.

Recommendation: Ensure it is only listed in the student menu.

Research Help Phone #/Chat Help

Phone numbers and the remote reference and research help options were confusing across the various sessions. For example, participants had difficulty differentiating between text and chat, main phone number and reference, etc.

Recommendation: List all reference and research support contact methods under one listing, use “Borrowing Services Desk” and “Reference Desk” as the terms for the different phone number listings, not “Main.”

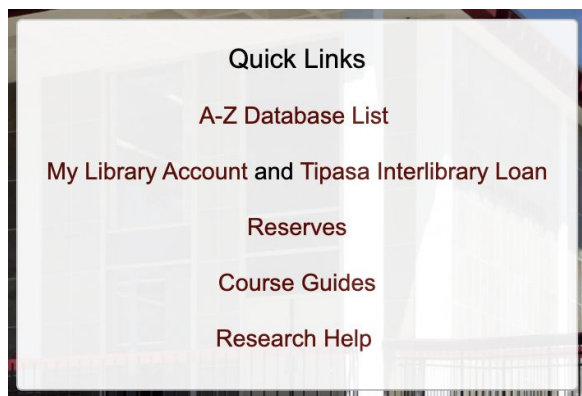
Tweaks and other Recommendations for Less Confusing Terms:

- *Circulation Phone #* - Update to “Borrowing Services”
- *Text Us* - Keep with other research contact methods only. Make sure it’s distinct from chat.
- *Directory* - Use “Library Employee Directory,” to clarify it’s not the website or college directory.
- *LGBTQ Materials* - As a donated collection, it should be highlighted, but maybe with other unique, but not historic collections. Work with Molly to develop a strategy for highlighting these collections.

- *Tutorials* - Differentiate from LibGuides. Potentially use “How To” Tutorials. Brainstorm further with library employees.
- *Newspapers* - Continue to create other guides to provide an overview for accessing other multi-format collections: magazines, reference, etc. Group guides together in the “Collections” menu.
- *State and Local Library Resources* - Use “Accessing State & Local Libraries”
- *Library Account* - Use “My Library Account”
- *Special Collections* - Use “Special Collections and Archives”
- *U.S. Government Resources* - Clarify that we’re a Repository Library, that these are both physical and digital collections. Brainstorm further with library employees.

Quick Links Box

Participants were asked create their own “Quick Links” box for the [library homepage](#) based on the most important menu items they had selected for the Drop Down Menus (About Library, Students, Faculty & Staff, and Contact Us)



We looked at what participants picked as their top 5 links. Then we analyzed all the library terminology they placed in their Drop Down menus (About Library, Students, Faculty & Staff, and Contact Us).

Most frequently used words participants put in Drop Down Menus and Quick Links Boxes

- Guides
- Database/Databases
- Course
- Account
- Research
- Help

Here are the most frequently used terms participants used as a Word Cloud

