Keyword Search Page
Usability Testing Report
December 21, 2004

Charge:

To test library users whether or not it would be preferable to provide the keyword search page with multiple input boxes and popup index qualifiers (Catalog Development Task Force recommendation #1a16).

1a16 Provide the keyword search page with multiple input boxes and popup index qualifiers.

For example, we used the library catalog at Union College’s Schaffer Library located at http://libraryopac.union.edu/screens/srchhelp_X.html.

This change will allow users to easily specify field qualifiers in their searches. It will also help them construct better searches.

Recommendation: Implement this feature.

Methodology:

We tested six undergraduates, all student library assistants, informally. They break down into these categories:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Number of students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 students are international</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We used the following script.

1. Introduction
   - We’re trying to find out if our keyword search page in the library catalog allows for easy and beneficial searches.
   - testing the pages, not you
   - Please think aloud – we can’t read your minds! (we may prompt you as we go)

2. Procedure

Ask the person to go to the Dartmouth Library Catalog and run the following searches at the keyword search page:
new media technology

new media technology with a limit to books published between 2001 and 2003

Ask the person to go to Schaffer Library at Union College, http://libraryopac.union.edu/screens/srchhelp_X.html, and run the same searches as above.

Ask the person which search experience they found most successful and why.

Ask the person if they have any ideas about how to make the Dartmouth Keyword Search page more usable.

Possible follow-up questions if needed:

- anything missing or needed
- Anything that stands out – helpful or not? why?
- language – any jargon, language that’s not clear?

Results:

1. Four out of the six students did not realize that the Dartmouth Keyword page searched by phrase first.
2. Three of the six students preferred the compact design of Schaffer Library’s keyword search page.
3. Two out of the six students suggested a link on the Dartmouth page to drop you down to the search examples at the bottom of the screen.
4. Two out of the six students felt that the date limits on the Dartmouth Page were confusing.
5. Two out of the six students found that having both a journal limit as well as having journal/book limit under material type confusing.
6. Two of the six students felt that Schaffer’s page made you more aware of what you were searching.

Some relevant random comments from persons tested:

On Dartmouth Keyword page:

- Why is journal separate from materials type?
- Year box stagger is somewhat confusing.
- Suggested adding “Limit By” to Dartmouth’s Search page
- Noted that on both pages that the date limit is confusing. After 2001 and before 2003 only brings up results for 2002. This could be confusing for some people.
- He suggested a button to create Boolean searches.
- He likes the interface. He thinks they break out the menus better.
- She also thought the display was confusing. She would prefer to have the author, title and date in separate columns in order to read it better.
• She recommended a box which says "Confused: see below."

Schaffer Library (Union College) Keyword Search Page:

• Subject liked setup of pages better. The limit boxes are better aligned.
• Liked that the search button was in the middle, larger and more distinctive.
• The interface makes you more aware of what you're searching.
• Liked the interface more for the look of the results. They were easier to read.
• Thought Schaffer's catalog would appeal to a first time user.
• He felt this was a more complicated introduction screen for searching.
• You must type words into each box rather than one.
• How about radio buttons to create or turn on Boolean searching.
• Felt that the Schaffer Library search screen allowed you to be more specific when searching then Dartmouth's Search page.
• Liked option of one word in each search box.
• He preferred condensed style of Schaffer over Dartmouth. He thought Dartmouth page was to spread out.
• Liked the multiple search options.
• The single lined results were more difficult to read within Dartmouth's catalog. He liked the layout of the results in the Schaffer catalog more because there is more space for the citations.
• He thought icons within Dartmouth's catalog would make it easier to identify materials on those single lines.

Recommendation:

Only one clear recommendation was forthcoming from our results. Students do not realize that keyword searching is first by phrase on the Dartmouth Keyword Search page. Therefore, we recommend that the interface include explanatory text telling users how the search works. For example, the text could say “This keyword search first searches the string of words you type. If it does not find any matching records, the search converts to a Boolean one and inserts “and” between each word.” However, we should note that most of our testers did not notice the search example under the box until we pointed the words out to them.

Half of the subjects preferred the design of the Schaffer Library Keyword Search pages because of its compact design.

Although we can guess that multiple input boxes and popup index qualifiers would assist students with better searches, we did not have any firm results that point to this as being preferable to our current keyword search page.

It should also be noted that all of our test subjects work in the library and this may have impacted our results.