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## Interface-Lift: The Houston Cole Library's Web Page Redesign Project

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### Introduction

Jacksonville State University (JSU) in Jacksonville, Alabama is a regional, accredited university located in the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains. JSU serves a student population of over 8,000. The Houston Cole Library has maintained a Web presence since 1996. In 1998 the Library created a committee to oversee the function and design of the Library's Web page. The Web Page Committee is made up of the Library's two Webmasters, two public services librarians, two technical services librarians, and the Library's Instructional Services Coordinator. Since its inception the committee has worked to make the Library's Web page as functional as possible. In recent times several committee members and other library public services personnel have received comments and complaints from the Library's patrons concerning the Library's Web page. These patrons expressed a difficulty in understanding some of the language used in the headings, resources, topics, or instructions, and a general concern that the page held too much information or appeared cluttered. The committee set out to make the Web site clearer, easier to navigate, and more user-friendly.

The authors constructed a survey (see **Appendix**) that was distributed to various library instruction sessions for both

undergraduate and graduate students during the 2001 spring semester (January-April) to gauge students' opinions and impressions. The survey was also posted to the Library's Web page and the JSU employee electronic discussion forum. Every effort was made to avoid duplication of the survey. At the end of the semester the surveys were evaluated and the results were used to redesign the Web page. The redesigned page was introduced during the last week of August 2001. This time was selected as optimum as it coincided with the upgrading of Voyager, the Library's integrated system, and because there would be no classes until September. This would give the Library staff time to adjust to the new design and incorporate it into instruction sessions.

### Survey Results

The total number of surveys distributed was undeterminable due to use of an electronic discussion forum where the number of recipients viewing the message was unknown. 129 surveys were returned. Of these 129, 103 (79.8%) were complete. The respondents were asked for their classification in order to ensure a broad coverage of JSU users. Broad coverage was essential for this project to assure that changes would not adversely affect any one classification but enhance the understanding and increase usage of the Library's site. Respondents were also asked how often they used the Library's Web page.

The respondents' classifications broke down as follows: freshmen (28%), sophomores (11%), juniors and seniors (16%), graduate students (8%), faculty (12%), and staff (9%). Two other classifications were listed but not selected: administration and visitor/other. Analysis of the data revealed no noticeable

discrepancies among the answers with regards to the respondents' classification.

Respondents were asked to indicate what part(s) of the Library's site they used the most and the least. See **Figure 1** for a depiction of the "old" web site respondents were asked to critique, also found at <http://www.jsu.edu/depart/library/graphic/temp/oldhome.htm> . Under the category "Resources," The Library Catalog received the most use as indicated by the 49 notations. The Electronic Databases were the second most used element of the Library's site as indicated by the 36 notations. Under the category heading "Services," Email a Librarian and the Virtual Tour were used the least as indicated, respectively, by 11 and eight notations. Interestingly, some of the respondents noted entire categories on the site rather than specific links. These responses gave the authors an idea of what elements could be removed from (or made less prominent in) the links offered on the Library's main site. The survey instrument in its entirety is found in the **Appendix**. Representative responses to questions 5-14 are included to provide a sampling of the survey results.

### Further Analysis and Resulting Changes

Sample responses from the survey results suggest that a fair amount of confusion existed regarding the "old" site. To address these issues, the committee suggested a number of changes. Due to the apparent confusion of some of the respondents link names were changed. For example, the survey results suggested that many patrons understood what the Library Catalog link meant but did not know what element to use to determine if the Library had a copy of a new book. One respondent answered, "I had no idea which link to click (in the Resources area) to simply look up a book in the library. I just did the trial-and-error method." Also, some respondents indicated that the terms Electronic Databases and Pathfinders were confusing. One patron stated, "Some of the titles of the links are misleading," while

another answered, "Some of the titles are self-explanatory, but the ones that aren't so clear can usually be figured out by playing with it for a little while."

The committee discussed additional name changes for other links that appeared to be "unclear" or confusing to the patron. This was done after detailed analysis of the survey results and a review of numerous library sites. The link entitled Library Catalog was changed to Find Books, and the link entitled Electronic Databases was changed to Find Articles. It was later suggested that the descriptors Library Catalog and Databases be added in parenthesis next to the link title. This decision was based on the terminology used by the librarians in the past, who had generally asked patrons if they looked for an item in the "catalog" or searched in one of our "databases." The use of these terms confused some of the newer patrons, who were simply looking for "books" or "articles." The committee thought that including both words in the main link would benefit both new and experienced patrons.

The library maintained several pages that provided research assistance, but these pages were often overlooked because of the link titles. Library or professional jargon, such as "pathfinder," had been used to describe some of these links, and use of such jargon often confused the patron. Again, based partly upon the survey results the committee combed these pages into one general area entitled Research Guides. The survey indicated that when asked what other resources were used to aid in their study, 57 (37.7%) patrons responded the Internet/Web. As a result the committee decided to gather the pages that the Library staff had previously constructed and combine them into a general area entitled Search the Internet. This area included annotated links to: 1) quality Web sites based on subject material, 2) sites that link to and describe search engines, and 3) instructions for evaluating and citing Web sites. Finally, the authors created a Tips page that provides assistance with common problems or questions.

As a result, the Library's new Web page had undergone a noticeable "interface" lift. See Figure 2, the "new site", also found at <http://www.jsu.edu/depart/library/>. Terminology has been replaced and information has been condensed on the redesigned page, making the page less confusing to the patrons. The changes have also addressed the concerns about information overload and the problems in navigation that were associated with the original page.

### **Conclusion**

The authors believe that by redesigning the Library's main page they have made the site more user friendly, easier to navigate, and much more intuitive. By surveying a broad compass of Library users the redesign project was beneficial and included a number of suggestions that might have been overlooked. A decision emerged from the survey to perform a usability study of the

Library's Web site every year. This study could be incorporated into the annual Users' Satisfaction Survey and would keep the committee informed as to any changes, requests, or complaints regarding the functionality and design of the Library Web page.

Even with the success of the survey and redesign project, the authors feel that more research and development is needed. Therefore, a decision was made to perform a follow up usability test. This test will be a comparison of the two versions of the Library's initial site. Volunteers will be sought to complete the comparison survey, which will ask specific questions in order to gauge the effectiveness of the link titles. Comments will be solicited from the volunteers to determine which links are more effective. The authors hope that additional study will further enhance the utility and appeal of the Library's site.

Figure 1 – Library’s original site

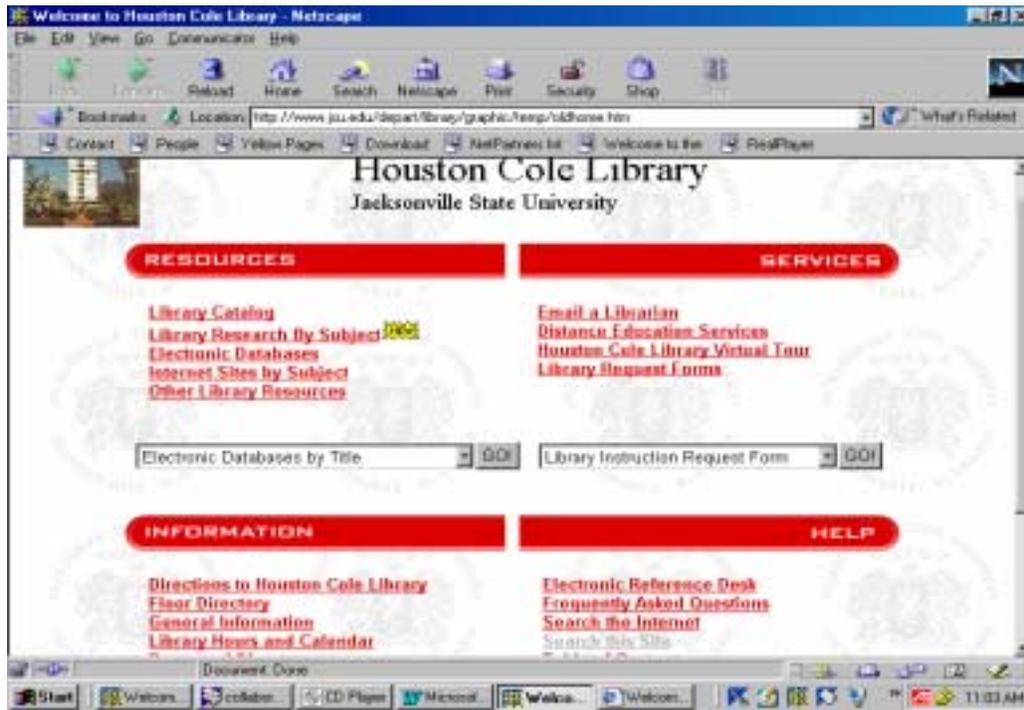


Figure 2: Library’s New Site



## Appendix

### Survey & Sample Responses\*

The Library is going to redesign the Web page in order to make it a more user-friendly resource. Your input is needed for this project. Please take a few minutes to answer the following questions.

1. What is your current status?

28% Freshman  
11% Sophomore  
16% Junior  
16% Senior  
8% Graduate Student  
12% Faculty  
9% Staff

2. How often do you use the Library's Web page?

24% a lot  
24.8% some  
30.2% a little  
20.9% not at all

3. What part(s) of the Library's Web page do you use most? (See the attached copy of the Library's Web page.)

Library Catalog: 49, Library Research by Subject: 19, Electronic Databases: 36, Internet Sites by Subject: 11

4. What part(s) of the Library's Web page do you use least? (See the attached copy of the Library's Web page.)

Internet Sites by Subject: 7, Services: 16 (entire category), Email a Librarian: 11, Virtual Tour: 8, Help: 10, Information: 9 (entire category)

5. If in the course of your study/research you needed material from a source other than a book, what would you use?

Internet/Web: 57, Magazine/Journal: 41, Databases: 23, Newspaper: 7

6. If you heard/read about a book, where would you look on the Library's Web page to see if we had a copy?

Library Catalog: 94, Electronic Databases: 8, Resources: 8

7. How would you find an article in a journal, magazine, or newspaper?

Electronic Databases: 50, Library Catalog: 20, Other Library Resources: 13, Library Research by Subject: 7

8. (For JSU students) If your instructor put something on reserve at the Library (ex: course syllabus, journal article, book, etc.), where would you expect to find the information on the Library's Web page?

Don't or Didn't Know: 20, Library Catalog: 16, Other Library Resources: 13, Electronic Reference Desk: 6

9. What information can you get from the Library Catalog? (Please check all that apply)

116 Books  
92 Journal titles  
62 Articles in journals  
55 Reserves  
64 Videos  
13 Other: (Please explain)  
Microforms: 3, Sound/Musical Recordings: 3, CD's: 2, Almost everything needed for research and sources of information, Other readings.

10. What information would you expect to see if you clicked on a link entitled "Contact Us"? (Please check all that apply)

92 Email directory of all Library employees  
72 Telephone directory of all Library employees  
104 One email address to send questions/comments  
110 The main contact address and telephone number for the Library  
86 The Library hours of operations  
69 Directions to the Library  
6 Other: (Please explain)  
Who can use the library, who can check out books, and information about the reference collection, What floor each employee works on, Provide information to get in touch with employees, Connection to the campus map,

Some of the above items don't belong under "Contact Us."

11. What would you expect to find if you clicked on a link entitled "Library Research by Subject"? (Please use the back if you need more room.)  
Blank or space to enter subject being researched: 21, Ability to type in subject and get all library holdings: 20, Unlimited search option/search engine: 13  
List of specific subjects/Library of Congress Subject Headings: 12, All books with a specific subject: 7, Subject matter being researched: 5, List of all subjects and where to find materials with specific subject: 3, General information about subjects: 3
12. What options/information would you expect to see if you clicked on a link entitled "Help"? (Please check all that apply)  
112 Information describing how to do research  
97 Information/Instructions for connecting to our databases from home  
89 A telephone number to call to talk to a librarian (a "question hot line number")  
95 An email address to send questions/comments  
114 A section for frequently asked questions  
4 Other: (Please explain)  
A search box to pull up categories of interest, A long drawn out page of directions, I would primarily expect to see information on how to use particular electronic search tool. The other information listed above would depend on the context, The current list.
13. Are there any terms on the Library's Web page that are confusing?  
14 Yes  
If yes, please explain:  
Topical Pathfinders: 2, Electronic Reference Desk: 1, Library Request Forms: 1 Some of the title of the links are misleading, Why are there two electronic database listings and what are the differences, What are the other library resources, What are the Internet sites by subject, When I search for a topic, the information returned is difficult to narrow down sometimes.

14. How would the Library's Web page be easier to use? (Please use the back if you need more room.)  
More computer terminals, more labs, and open later, More specific subjects (too general), Journal article index as separate site, More information about library collection, Information/instructions on how to search for scholarly journals from home, Sometimes databases are hard to find, Need more helpful information on finding a subject, research a certain subject without listing all books or information associated with a word included in the subject, Have more of a selection to choose from, Could be easier to use from home, Teach the students how to use it, Locating things by specific subjects,
- \* The survey itself is presented in its entirety. The results listed are a sample of the total survey responses. They do not include all the respondents' comments.

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