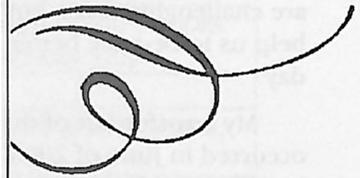


LIBRARY WEB SITE ASSESSMENT: FROM FOCUS GROUPS TO PARETO CHARTS

by Donna J. Davidoff and Lisa A. Forrest



As academic libraries strive to remain relevant in today's "Google-ized" world, it is critical that library services and collections are evaluated for continuous improvement. At E. H. Butler Library, Buffalo State College, these essential information resources are made available through the library Web site. Effective Web design is imperative to a successful library experience for patrons.

In November 2006, a library task force was given the charge of evaluating the Web site. Although staff members believed that the site could benefit from some minor improvements, patron satisfaction had never officially been assessed. Five focus groups were organized to elicit feedback from students, faculty, and staff. Each focus group had five to ten attendees, all of whom were asked the same set of open-ended questions including:

How would you describe your experience using our Web site?

How would you describe the links on the home page?

How would you describe the terminology on the Web site?

How can we make the site better?

Two members of the task force attended each focus group session to act as facilitator and note-taker. In addition to getting answers to specific questions, the facilitator also encouraged related feedback from the group.

Following the conclusion of the interviews, the task force coordinator organized the results of the focus group conversations into an overview grid containing the descriptive content of the discussions. While most certainly useful, this text-based grid of participant comments did not provide a clear visual analysis of the results of the study. To be able to initiate changes, the task force needed to examine the results in a consolidated, prioritized way.

Coincidentally, another group of staff members from Butler Library were attending workshops on

Continuous Assessment - Continuous Improvement (CACI) for libraries sponsored by the South Central Regional Library Council in New York State. The CACI team decided to put their new-found knowledge to work presenting the focus group results in a more concise, graphical form.

First, they studied the many pages of comments. Although study participants offered a wide range of specific suggestions, their comments could be grouped into several descriptive categories. The CACI team then created two check sheets: one with positive comments about Web site features and a second with ideas for improving the site. (see figures 1, 2).

The results of each check sheet were then placed into a Pareto chart, a type of bar graph that plots data in descending order. (See figures 3,4). The Pareto principle states that 80 percent of problems usually stem from 20 percent of the causes. In other words, when several factors affect a situation, only a few are responsible for most of the problem. A Pareto chart helps identify the factors on which to concentrate efforts for optimal improvement.

When the comments were placed in this format, it was easy to see the results of the study summarized, revealing a more manageable list of prioritized items. Although the focus groups were small in number, the participant's comments were surprisingly consistent. Task force members learned that aesthetics are important to patrons; suggestions included more photos, graphics, and color. Although the site was judged to be well-organized and easy to navigate, there were requests for fewer links and less wordiness. Now that these factors have been identified, the library Web editors have a better idea about where to concentrate their revision efforts. While Butler Library's Web site may not give Google a run for its money, it is hoped that the changes made will help to keep the library relevant and attract both new and experienced users.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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Comment Categories	Number of Responses	Specific Comments
Aesthetics		
Easy to Navigate	////	Easier than UB, clear, good for finding books, well laid out
Well Organized	////	Simple, straight forward, not too flashy; clear
		Good balance between utility and aesthetics
		Big improvement from last version of Website
Wording / Text		
Helpful Titles	//	Useful, works good
Clear	//	
Resources		
Helpful Staff	//	Like the librarians
Useful Collection	////	Good book collection
		Always find the articles I need; find lots of education articles, variety of databases is good
Like the links	///	Like the blog, like the new links, like columns of links

Figure 1: Positive comments, organized into three areas (Graphics by Dennis Reed, Jr.)

Comment Categories	Number of Responses	Specific Comments
Aesthetics		
More graphics & photos	////	Photos that change
Color for background	///	Gray or orange, Darker color
Friendlier, more inviting	//	
Wording / Text		
Too many links	////	Consolidate links
Wordy	////	overwhelming
Less jargon	//	
Resources		
Add coffee shop menu	/	
Add campus-related info	///	Link to professors Web pages, ANGEL link
Need tutorials	//	Media tutorial, plagiarism tutorial
More information on blog	/	
Expand research category	///	
Descriptions of databases	///	What is Bengal? Don't know which ones to use
Computer help links	//	
More special features	//	Banned books, "Did you know" feature

Figure 2: Suggestions for improvement, organized into three areas (Graphics by Dennis Reed, Jr.)

Rooftop Poetry Club. Lisa's writing has been featured in a variety of local and national publications, including *American Libraries*, *eco-poetics*, *The Buffalo News*, *Word Wrights*, and on *WBFO*, Buffalo's local National Public Radio station.

Donna J. Davidoff is an Associate Librarian at Buffalo State College, State University of New York, where she is a reference and interlibrary loan librarian, as well as editor of the E. H. Butler Library Web site. Her work has been published in *Reference Services Review*, *Online*, and *Judaica Librarianship*.

Figure 3: Pareto Chart of Positive Comments

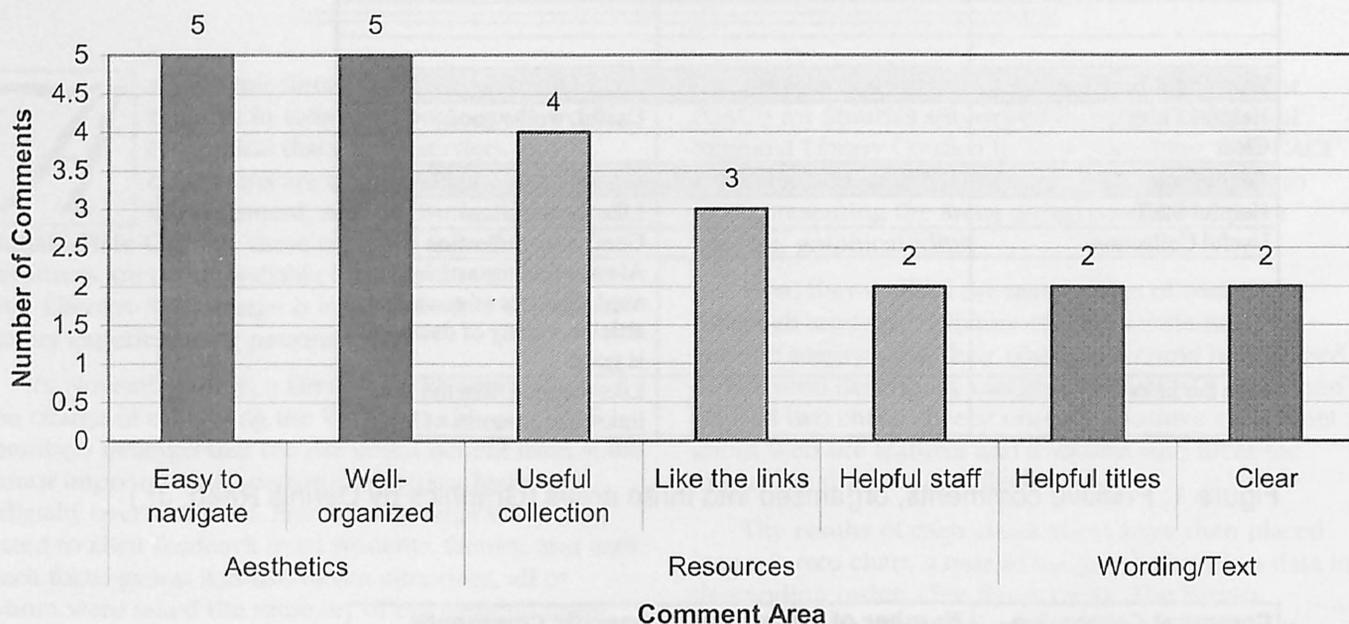


Figure 4: Pareto Chart of Suggestions for Improvement

