

**Project Title:** Electronic Resources and Services at UMass Lowell Libraries: Improved Access and Usage Through Usability Testing and Instruction

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**Project Abstract:**

In order to improve and promote access and usage of its electronic resources, the UML Library unveiled a major redesign of its database subject pages for spring semester 2008. The new pages feature federated searching along with an improved link-resolving service. We now plan to assess the effectiveness and instruct the use of these new initiatives through a series of usability tests, surveys, and usage-statistical analyses, along with improved classroom instruction and online video tutorials.

**Preliminary Final Report:**

At the time of my grant proposal in February 2008, the totals reported for the number of online subscription databases was 135, with “full-text access to nearly 40,000 online journals and over 13,000 e-books.” In the past year and a half, although the overall database total has remained about the same, the number of online journals has climbed to nearly 52,000 and e-books to over 63,000. Those increases represent a 30% jump in journal titles and a 400% jump in e-books. Clearly the management of these resources is increasing in complexity while the need for detailed analysis of rising expenditures is more urgent than ever. On the other hand, development of multifaceted approaches to promotion, presentation, and instruction demand far more attention to assure that users are aware of the resources available and understand how to utilize them.

**Project Deliverables stated in original proposal:**

1. An established system of iterative usability testing in support of UML Library web site project development
2. A report of compiled survey data characterizing the UML Library’s user community
3. A report of usage statistics and cost analysis of subscription electronic resources
4. Two informational online video tutorials on the use of “360 Search” and “360 Link”
5. Trained faculty through Fridays with Faculty and Summer Institute

**Accomplishments to date:**

1. A success usability study procedure was established. 25 usability tests were conducted. The first set studied the newly re-designed database pages and a second set studied the improvements to that design as a result of the first round of testing. A third group of tests

were performed to study the first tutorial created. And finally a fourth group of tests were completed to study student reactions to four major e-book vendor sites.

This total is one quarter of the amount of usability studies anticipated. The lesser amount resulted from two factors: the realization that more studies of the same situation did not result in more useful feedback, and the time and trouble it took to recruit, schedule, conduct, and review the tests. We found that after three or four tests, the feedback became mostly redundant. With the e-book vendor site tests we did increase the number of test participants due to the complexity of the subject and the preference for a more broad-based sample.

Next steps: The library has been promised control of its web site again and is preparing a complete redesign. This week we will have completed three variations on a design scheme which we plan to test with usability studies and then hope to conduct further studies at regular intervals during the redesign process over the next couple of months.

2. As stated in my December interim report, I installed the open source survey application, *Lime Survey*, on a library server and collected approximately 40 survey results. In the future, with control over our website, one advantage will be the opportunity to post a link to our surveys on our website.
3. A review was conducted of all database providers, access to usage reports for each vendor was confirmed, updated, or newly established and usage statistics were compiled for the previous three years. Refinements were also made in the way of interactive forms and queries in the Access database application I have been constructing to help manage and analyze electronic resource subscriptions.

Next steps: The usage data needs to be imported into Access and integrated with related data pertaining to subscription cost. We will then have the capacity to produce cost per use reports for all of the resources.

4. Three tutorials were completed this past year and we are still actively completing a fourth. One has been posted on the library's KnowHow web page -- <http://library.uml.edu/knowhow/360forweb/360forweb.html>.

Next steps: All four tutorials will need to be updated next year to comply with the library's website redesign. Also, now that we have learned valuable lessons about tutorial production, we are well positioned to create more of them in the future.

5. I conducted one Faculty Summer Institute in July 2008.