A Notice on Content of Library and Information Science (LIS) Schools Web Sites

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This paper identifies trends in the content of home pages for Web sites of LIS Schools. Out of the 94 LIS School Web sites on a list maintained by the Internet Training and Consulting Services (ITCS), only 62 sites were working and showed no errors. All 62 Web sites were downloaded in a one-month period (May 2002) using the Microsoft Excel spreadsheet program, and the data collected from each home page was tabulated. The most common elements were then incorporated into a model home page that visually shows the predominant content on this type of Web site.

Introduction

The emergence and rapid diffusion of the World Wide Web (WWW) has influenced global awareness and commerce.

Due to the unique specifications of the WWW and its importance to commerce, trade of information and particularly scholarly communications, the Web site has become one of the most visible artefacts amongst scholars, and the home page has become the starting point for them to explore the resources available. Therefore, the examination and assessment of Web sites is a current field of study in a variety of disciplines. Libraries and information schools are no exception.

At the present time, Library and Information School Web pages are standard features. It is only logical to review them for utility and interactivity. The purpose of this article is to examine the home pages of Library and Information Schools, to identify their principle characteristics in terms of content configuration and to determine current trends.

After a brief review of the literature the presentation of experimental design and methodology follows. Results of the study are then presented, and discussion of the results and conclusions completes this short study.

Literature review

Although a body of literature pertaining to the systematic study of Web sites' content and structure is developing (Cohen & Still 1999), it seems that studies of the content of library and information Web sites are studied rarely. The need to write cognitive guidelines for the design of better home pages based on an experiment was pointed out by Dalal et al. (2000). Huizingh (2000) mentioned how little is known about Web site design and presented a framework consisting of two parts: content and design. He used this framework to investigate how different groups of corporations use the Web. While the above two studies are about other subject fields, Thomas and Willett (2000) considered the Web sites of LIS

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Schools in the United Kingdom. They concluded that situation data is not well suited to the quantitative evaluation of the research status of LIS Schools. They suggest that LIS Schools can best boost their Web visibility by hosting as wide a range of types of material as possible. Chu (1998) studied the Web sites of 12 ALA accredited LIS Schools in the United States, using clustering and multidimensional scaling techniques. The findings of her study were inconclusive because of the partial data set problem and the limitations of the data collection tool (i.e. Web search engines).

This notice is based on a study of the home pages of 94 LIS Schools examined to identify their principle characteristics in terms of content configuration to determine current trends.

Methodology

Data were extracted from a list on the Internet, maintained as a public service to the LIS community by the director of the Internet Training and Consulting Services (ITCS). The list contained 94 LIS School Web sites (in May 2002), and, of these, only 62 were working and didn't show errors.

The 62 Web sites belonged to 18 countries. Countries with multiple sites were: USA (59), UK (8), Germany (5), Australia (4), Finland and Sweden (3 each), and Puerto Rico (2). Brazil, Croatia, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, Iceland, Italy, The Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Spain and Switzerland each had one Web site in this list.

All 62 Web sites were downloaded during a one-month period (May 2002). The total number of occurrences for content features was calculated and a simple percentage obtained. The most common elements have been then incorporated into a model Web site that visually shows the predominant design characteristics and hypertext links on this type of Web site.

Results and discussions

A Library and Information School Web site can play different roles. It is a communication tool where information about school, academic staff, students, courses, programs, services and facilities can be found. It is used as a window to the WWW making Internet resources available on a selective basis for both academic staff and stu-
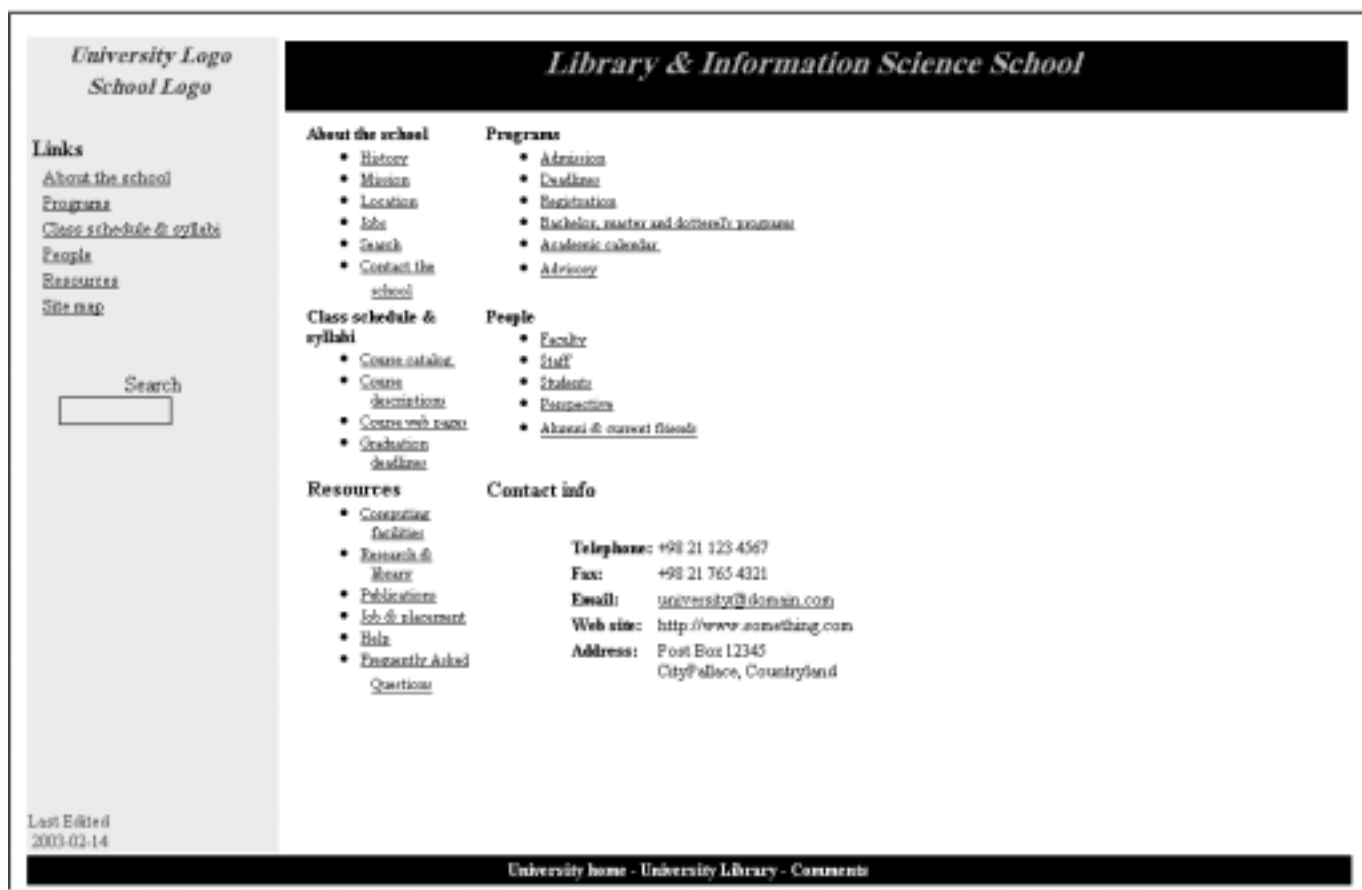
Table 1: Content analysis

Rank	Web site content	No. of Occurrences	Percentage (%)
1	People	42	67.7
2	Courses	40	64.5
3	Programs	40	64.5
4	News & Events	37	59.7
5	Library	35	56.5
6	Online Resources	33	53.2
7	Research	33	53.2
8	Search the site	33	53.2
9	Admission	25	40.3
10	Alumni	25	40.3
11	Jobs/careers	22	35.5
12	Student/prospects/current	21	33.9
13	Distance/continuing education	20	32.3
14	Calendar	13	21.0
15	Related links/Organization	12	19.4
16	Hand book/graduate bullet./Brochure	11	17.7
17	Registration	11	17.7
18	Publications	10	16.1
19	FAQ	8	12.9
20	Course evaluation	3	4.8
21	Inter Library loan	1	1.6
22	Exhibition	1	1.6
23	Lab members	1	1.6

dents. It also can serve as a workstation where academic and students find databases, dissertations, electronic texts and online public access catalogues. The results of this survey show that most Library and Information Schools are using their Web sites to cover all these roles.

Table 1 provides data about the most general links available in a LIS home page. Links presented in over 59% of Web sites are: people, courses, programs, and news & events. This is an indication that the main functions of the LIS School Web site are to provide information about people and immediate access to the school programs, courses and its news & events. Libraries, online resources, research and search-the-site are the next features that ranked 4–8 with 53.2%–56.5% of the sites containing these features. These features are provided to make the University library as well as the online resources and the school research programs and projects accessible to the users.

As can be seen in Table 1, 33 Web sites provided a way to search their home pages. 25 (40.3%) of studied Web sites have admission and alumni

Figure 1: Proposed model home page for LIS Schools

University Logo
School Logo

Library & Information Science School

Links
About the school
Programs
Class schedule & syllabi
People
Resources
Site map

Search

About the school
- History
- Mission
- Location
- Jobs
- Search
- Contact the school

Programs
- Admission
- Deadline
- Registration
- Bachelor, master and doctoral programs
- Academic calendar
- Advisory

Class schedule & syllabi
- Course catalog
- Course descriptions
- Course web page
- Graduation deadline

People
- Faculty
- Staff
- Students
- Perspective
- Alumni & current friends

Resources
- Computing facilities
- Research & library
- Publications
- Job & placement
- Help
- Frequently Asked Questions

Contact info

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Fax: +98 21 765-4321
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Web site: http://www.something.com
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Last Edited
2003-02-14

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links, which can facilitate application for admission and alumni keeping in touch with the school. Jobs/careers appeared in 22 LIS School Web sites with 35.5 percent. Twenty-one (33.9%) of 62 Web sites had a link for students/prospective & current. Some LIS School Web sites insert this feature in the "People" link. Twenty (32.3%) of LIS School Web sites had a link for distance or continuing education. A calendar with 21.0% and registration (17.7 %) may be gathered in one feature. Osorio (2001) states the most common links found related to other institutional sites are basically considered standard links: University Web sites, main libraries and links to a college or department.

In this study only 12 (19.4 %) of Web sites had a feature for related links. Handbooks/graduate bulletins/brochures (17.7%) were provided for student's information and help. Only 10 (16.1%) of the schools place their publications on their Web sites. Since school publications are important resources for students and their colleagues in other schools, it seems necessary that LIS schools offer (upload) their publications on their Web

sites. In other words, this feature may be considered as a growth trend. Only 3 (4.8%) of studied Web sites had a course evaluation function and the rest each had a feature: interlibrary loan, exhibitions and lab members (1.6% each).

As it is shown in Table 1, 23 elements were found with at least one occurrence. One of the major problems in locating services and resources on a Web site is the use of terminology (Dewey 1999). In many of Web sites, this study observed that multiple terms are used to indicate the same resource or service. It gets more confusing when, within the same Web site, different terms are used as headings to designate the same task. For example some of the terms used such as people, alumni, academics, and students are related and can be collected under a single heading are used separately on the page (mostly without any sub-arrangement), and in some cases are used interchangeably.

In the model (Figure 1), the related terms are collected under a heading to avoid making vague and confusing references on Web pages.

To identify the predominant design features and content elements, the elements (e.g. calendar, distance/continuing education) that appear with more that a 20% frequency are considered predominant elements. The model page offered contains the predominate elements in today's home pages of LIS Schools.

This study found that a Web site is a tool for presenting five major LIS School functions: 1) information about the school, 2) programs, 3) courses, 4) people and 5) resources. Each of these functions will contain several subsets, which will be presented in the LIS School model. In comparison, the framework of a Library Web site has four major functions: information, reference, research and instruction based on the findings of Cohen and Still (1999).

Since the home pages are designed according to the aims and objectives of the host institutions, one institution's home page cannot be used for another. Thus, this model LIS School Web site can only be used for any school with some addition and changes according to the aims and objectives of those schools and their parent bodies.

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