Behind the Scenes of Academic Library Website Design: Patterns and Trends from 2012 to the Present

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About Us

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Why Study Academic Library Website Design?

- “What do other libraries do?”
- Get a big picture view
- Inform website design decision-making
- Distinguish trends and design patterns
- Find commonalities
- Identify potential partnerships
Research Questions

• Main Website Navigation
  • Design patterns? Labels? Mega footer present?

• Content Management
  • Open source CMS? Responsive design? Redesign?

• Collection Search Options
  • Discovery service? Tabbed vs. single search? Labels? Results?
Research Sample

• 37 academic library websites, all members of the Association of Southeastern Research Libraries (ASERL)
• Large enough sample, but not too large
• Mix of medium and large public and private academic libraries
• Peer group of mostly similar libraries
• Includes some well-staffed institutions with advanced interface designs
Research Methodology

• Initial Research (2015)
  • Websites visited and evaluated in Fall 2015
  • Internet Archive used to view 2012 versions of websites
  • Data gathered and tracked in a spreadsheet

• Follow Up Research (2018/2019)
  • Websites visited again in late 2018 / early 2019
  • Internet Archive used again to view 2013 and 2016 versions of websites
  • Analysis of data
# Website Navigation - Design Patterns

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Navigation Style</th>
<th>2012</th>
<th>2015</th>
<th>2019</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Horizontal Nav at Top (with Dropdowns)</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>48.6%</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horizontal Nav at Top (Without Dropdowns)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>18.9%</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vertical Nav at Left</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>18.9%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combination</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>13.5%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Notes:
- **Horizontal Nav at Top** with Dropdowns has shown a significant increase from 2012 to 2015 and maintained the same in 2019.
- **Horizontal Nav at Top** Without Dropdowns has also seen an increase from 2012 to 2015 but decreased slightly in 2019.
- **Vertical Nav at Left** has remained consistent throughout the years.
- The **Combination** option has seen a decline from 2012 to 2019, with no instances in 2019.
Example of Horizontal Nav at Top
Example of Vertical Nav at Left
1. Focus on Top User Tasks
2. Simplicity
3. Consistent Labelling Style
4. Clear Labels with No Ambiguity
5. Order Matters
6. Give a Sense of Your Organisation

# Website Navigation – Labels

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Used More Often</th>
<th>2012 Labels</th>
<th>2015 Labels</th>
<th>2019 Labels</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>About</td>
<td>About</td>
<td>About</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Services</td>
<td>Services</td>
<td>Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Research</td>
<td>Research</td>
<td>Research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Collections</td>
<td>Collections</td>
<td>Collections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Help</td>
<td>Help</td>
<td>Help</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Find</td>
<td>Find</td>
<td>Find</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Search</td>
<td>Search</td>
<td>Search</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The used labels are listed in order of frequency, with 2019 labels being more frequently used than 2015 labels, which in turn are used more than 2012 labels.
Website Navigation – Mega Footers

**Mega Footer** – a lengthy list of links that often parallel, but sometimes augment, the main navigation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2015</th>
<th>2019</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mega Footers Total</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>35.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WITH main nav dropdown</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WITHOUT main nav dropdown</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11</td>
<td>29.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Content Management Systems

“A content management system (CMS) is a software application or set of related programs that are used to create and manage digital content. CMSes are typically used for enterprise content management (ECM) and web content management (WCM).” “A WCM facilitates collaborative authoring for websites.”

Open Source CMS Advantages

- Decentralized access to content updates
- Consistent design
- Administrators can control permissions
- Modular

- Complex development made easy
- Large user communities
- Responsive
- Accessible*

## Open Source CMS Use Trends

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2012</th>
<th>2015</th>
<th>2019</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>9</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drupal</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WordPress</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plone</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joomla</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Open Source CMS Use in 2019

Drupal

LSU
Florida State
George Mason
William & Mary
UNC Charlotte

Duke
NCSU
Univ of Georgia
Georgia Tech
Tulane

Wordpress

Univ of Mississippi
Georgia State
UNC Chapel Hill
Univ of Alabama
Univ of South FL

Johns Hopkins
Clemson
East Carolina
Univ of Central FL
UT – Knoxville
Responsive Design

**Responsive design** is an approach to web page creation that makes use of flexible layouts, flexible images and cascading style sheet media queries. The goal of responsive design is to build web pages that detect the visitor's screen size and orientation and change the layout accordingly.

Responsive Design

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2012</th>
<th>2013</th>
<th>2014</th>
<th>2015</th>
<th>2019</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Responsive Sites</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5.4%</td>
<td>32.4%</td>
<td>62.2%</td>
<td>73.0%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Redesign

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2011</th>
<th>2012</th>
<th>2013</th>
<th>2014</th>
<th>2015</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Redesign</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8.1%</td>
<td>8.1%</td>
<td>5.4%</td>
<td>24.3%</td>
<td>29.7%</td>
<td>24.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

21 sites have been redesigned since the 2015 study
Collection Search – Web-Scale Discovery

**Web-Scale Discovery Services** – tools that search seamlessly across a wide range of local and remote content and provide relevance-ranked results – have the ambitious goal of providing a single point of entry into a library's collections.

## Web-Scale Discovery Service Trends

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>2012</th>
<th>2015</th>
<th>2019</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Summon</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EDS</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primo</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WorldCat Discovery</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encore</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None (or custom)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Collection Search – Design Trends

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2012</th>
<th>2015</th>
<th>2019</th>
<th>2019</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tabbed</strong></td>
<td>27</td>
<td>75.7%</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>62.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Single</strong></td>
<td>9</td>
<td>21.6%</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>35.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Multiple</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Example of Tabbed Search Design
Example of Single Search Design
Collection Search - Labels

Terms most commonly used in tabbed search boxes:

- Databases
- Search (also within phrases such as “Quick Search” or “One Search”)
- Catalog
- Articles
- Books (also within phrases such as “Books & More” or “Books +”)
- Guides
- E-Journals
## Collection Search – Results Display

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>2019</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Standard</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>73.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Custom Bento Box</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>21.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Custom Tabbed</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Example of Bento Box Search Results
Example of Tabbed Search Results

International Studies - Climate Change
Key Resources include Climate Change Knowledge Portal, Climate For Development, Open Climate Data, Open Data Topic page and more. Click on Related Links for a long list of websites. EPN list of sites from mostly U.S. Government agencies. A joint study by four UN agencies that analyzed regional climate tre...

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Climate Change Research - Databases
Off-campus access is restricted to current Florida State faculty, students and staff. You will be prompted to login with your FSU user name and password. Global Warming Climate Change Greenhouse Effect Climatic Change Global Temperature Changes Greenhouse Emissions Carbon Dioxide ...

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Design Commonalities in 2019

• **Main Website Navigation:**
  • Horizontal Nav at Top with Dropdowns – 70%
  • Navigation Labels – About | Services | Collections | Help | Research | Find | Search
  • Mega Footer – 30%

• **Content Management**
  • Open Source – 57% (Drupal & Wordpress most common)
  • Responsive Design – 100%
  • Redesign – 25 to 30% per year (every 3-4 years)

• **Collection Search Options**
  • Web-Scale Discovery – 95% (EDS and Primo most common)
  • Tabbed Search – 54% Single Search – 46%
  • Tabbed Labels – Databases | Search | Catalog | Articles | Books | Guides | E-Journals
  • Standard Results – 73% Bento Box – 22%
What’s Next?

Publication of 2012-2015 study:


Publication of 2019 follow-up study anticipated soon