Library Guides Web Usability: UX Study

Background Information

- 7 undergraduate students were interviewed during the week of February 23rd to 27th.
- Students were asked to navigate the Library's and LibGuides' websites (See Appendix A).
- 1 of 7 students was aware of Library Guides before the interview.

Results: Finding Library Guides

How do students get to Library Guides?
- Based on a description of Library Guides (without using the term) provided to students, they were asked to find LibGuides from the Library's homepage.
1. Most students started at the Get Assistance tab.
2. From the description provided, almost all of the students seemed to retain that Library Guides contained "course" information above all other types of information. As such, almost all of the students reached LibGuides through Get Assistance --- Teaching Support --- **Course Guides** OR Find --- Find by Topic --- **Find by Course**.
3. One student (who had previous experience with Library Guides) followed Get Assistance --- Research Help --- Library Guides.

What does the term "Library Guides" mean to students?
- Most students did not know about Library Guides.
    - Students thought the term was broad and confusing.
    - One student said *"When I think Library Guide I think a Guide of the Library, like something more about the Library rather than information"*
    - Another student *said "I guess some people don't know what to associate the Library with. Maybe they don't think of it as having academic information about writing and stuff"*
- Once students understood Library Guides they thought the term was apt. Often they did not have suggestions for an alternative title.
- The main issue was articulated by one student *"It ["Library Guides"] is appropriate, you have 3 different guides and that is what they are. It makes sense, but if I was looking for something for a specific issue or class that is not the place I would look for it".*

Results: Interacting with Library Guides

How do students find a specific Course Guide?
1. Course Guides menu --- scroll through list
2. Search Box (enter complete course code)

How do students find a Topic Guide?
1. Search Box - Most students were unsure if "systematic reviews" was a topic or subject so most resorted to typing the term into the Search Box.
2. Topic Guides menu --- scroll through list

How do students choose a link on a given Library Guide?
- Students are most likely to choose a link that is: (1) familiar and (2) within the top 3 listed.
- Students indicated that the description under each link is important when making this decision.

How do students find the process of opening an e-book linked from Library Guides?
- Most students thought this was straight forward.
- Some students preferred being directed to the "Details" tab on Primo.
  - One student said *"I kind of liked seeing the Details because I think that forces people to be more critical of what they are reading as opposed to 'here is the resource'".*

Results: Getting Help

When do student start their inquiry?
- Students were presented with a scenario: they had to write a précis for a course assignment. Précis was chosen purposefully as it was thought students may not be unfamiliar with this term. In actuality, none of the students were familiar with the term. So, where did students turn to learn about an unfamiliar type of assignment?
1. **Google:** Most students started at Google. From the returned results, they selected a resource from a University because it was *"more reliable".*
   - After gaining an understanding, some students went to the Library's website to find UoG-specific information. They often looked under Get Assistance.
2. **Library's Website:** One student started at the Library's website and used the search box.
   - She began at the Library's Website because, *"I know it is Guelph approved as opposed to something else that is not tailored towards what Guelph wants".*

Where do students get help on a given Library Guide?
1. They don't.
   - In this scenario, as participants in a Library Study, they perceived that the Ask Us icon was most likely where they were supposed to click.
   - None of the students had ever clicked the icon before for various reasons like, *"I thought it might take you to some FAQ Top 5 Questions list"* and "*I hesitated to click on that because I thought it was just a list of information".*

What method of Help do students prefer?
- These students had never sought help on the Library's website so this was a difficult question. When prompted students said they preferred chat *"if it was instant".*

Results: General Impressions

What do students think is the most useful Guide: Course, Subject or Topic?
- Topic and Course Guides are the most useful. Upperclassmen preferred the Topic Guides.
  - One student explained, *"At this point in my education, I know where to go to find articles for research and I know that all of my courses have Course Link pages so if there are important resources, the links are provided there. The Topic Guides help when you are trying to figure out how to do a new citation, or style of writing, that kind of thing".*

- Another student explained that Subject Guides aren't as helpful *"because there is so much variation between classes in Environmental Science that it is too broad to have a general focus"*.

What do students think could make Library Guides better?
- All students commented that getting to Library Guides was challenging.
  - The shared sentiment was to have a link to Library Guides on the Library's homepage.
- One student suggested thinking beyond the Library's website because *"if you are already going onto the Library website than you are already taking that step and looking"*.
- In terms of layout, most students were content with the amount of information and the manner in which it was presented.
  - One student suggested making the headings bolder so they stood out more.

Recommendations

Improve Visibility:
One of the most consistent themes to emerge was that Library Guides are really valuable to students. One student commented at the end of the study, *"I'm just excited I found out about the Library Guides, just a super resource that I didn't know existed"*!

The major issue is finding Library Guides because (1) students do not know what the term "Library Guides" means; (2) students do not expect Library Guides to have the type and amount of information they do; and (3) students do not browse the Library's homepage and therefore they do not find the Library Guides' links hidden under the menus. When students use the Library's homepage they go directly to the resource they want i.e. Primo or links from Top Pages.

Once students understood Library Guides they thought the title was appropriate. One student said *"There is a wide range of stuff though, so it would be hard to get an all-encompassing term"* and *"Library Guides is a smart name because that is what it is doing, guiding you through all of the databases"*. In other words, instead of creating a new title effort should be directed towards education and promotion.

Recommendation #1
- Create a link on the Library's Homepage either under Top Pages or within its own box - a short description of Library Guides would also be beneficial to include.

Recommendation #2
- On the existing links include more information about Library Guides. For example, the link could read "Library Guides: Course, Topic & Subject Info" or Library Guides could be its own Heading under the Get Assistance and Find menus.

Recommendation #3
- Explore opportunities to promote Library Guides from websites external to the Library. This could attract users that don't frequent the Library's website.

Recommendation #4
When "Library Guides" is searched on the Library's homepage, LibGuides is the sixth returned result. Failing to be one of the top results is an issue in itself. Compounding this, the link takes users to the [Library Guides account page](#) NOT the University's LibGuides homepage.

- Library Guides should be the top result AND the resultant link should go directly to the University's LibGuides homepage.

Improve Help Support:

Students (1) did not look for help on LibGuides; (2) were unaware of the function of the Ask Us icon; (3) did not realize there was a chat option; and (4) did not expect it to be instant. When prompted they indicated their preferred method for help was chat.

Recommendation #4
- Include a chat widget near the Ask Us icon on LibGuides' pages to make the chat option more recognizable and to combat the issues with the Ask Us icon.

Improve Design Elements:

The following are recommendations based on students' feedback on Library Guides' visual presentation.

Recommendation #5
- Create or improve the descriptions under each link. Students consult the descriptions when deciding which link is the most appropriate for them.

Recommendation #6
- Increase the font of headings to allow the page to be more scannable.

Appendix A: Interview Guide

1. **Scenario A**: [Start on neutral webpage]. You are asked to write a précis for an assignment. You need more information about the structure of a précis. What would you do? Where would you go?
2. [If not at the Library's Website prompt them there] Where would you go to find information to help you with writing your précis on the **Library's website**?
   - What terms are they looking for?
3. [Close all windows. Go back to Library Website]. We have specific webpage with a list of topic, subject and course information. Can you find that?
   - What kind of information do you think "Library Guides" contains?
   - What does the term "Library Guides" mean to you?
4. **Scenario B**: [Close all windows]. You are struggling with finding newspapers for an assignment for COURSE CODE. Where would you go?
   - How are they interacting with the LibGuides landing page?
5. [Prompt to go to Course Guide] What link would you use to get newspapers?
   - Was it difficult for them to find a resource under "Top Picks: Newspapers"?
   - What links are they clicking on?
   - What do you think about the layout of this guide?
6. **Scenario C:** Using the Library Guides find a book on systematic reviews. [Prompt them to access the electronic resource]… How did they find this process?
   - What would make this process easier?
7. Where on this page would you go to get help? [Show them the Ask Us button].
   - What method of help do you prefer (chat, email, in person, etc.)?
8. Have you used Library Guides before? How did you know about them? Have you used them more than once?
9. What do you think is the most helpful for you (course, topic or subject)? Why?
10. What do you think about the amount of information included in the Guides? (More info? Less info? Emphasize help options? More customization to assignments? Etc.)
11. How could we make Library Guides better? More visible?