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Accessibility of Research Assistance in Georgia Four-Year Public Academic Libraries

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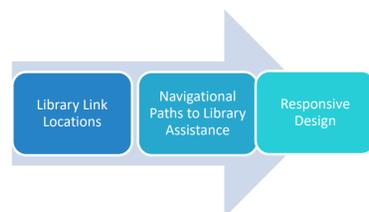
Introduction

The best way to teach patrons information literacy is first to be accessible. This study employs webometric content analysis to assess the navigability of the state of Georgia's four-year public, academic libraries. The research focuses on the frequency of the academic library link's appearance on the university homepage, the navigational paths to crucial content on library websites, and the degree to which responsive design was integrated into the academic library websites. The age of virtual education has grown substantially and quickly during this unique time of a global pandemic. Resultingly, so must grow the attention to the accessibility of discovery and assistance on our academic libraries' websites.
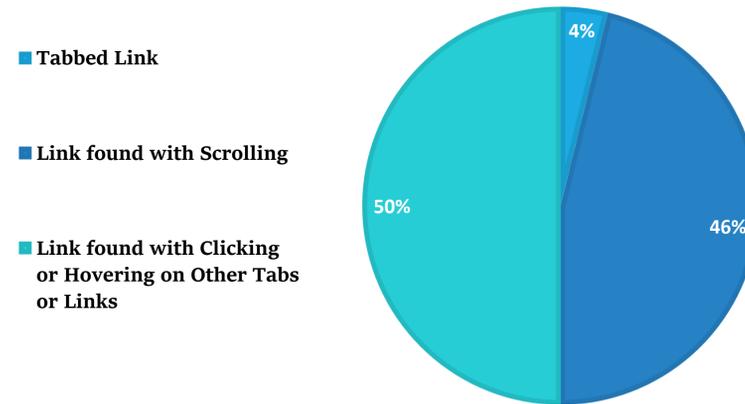
Objectives

- To highlight consistencies that others may consider and possibly use to better their own websites.
- To emphasize the need of clear and direct information access.
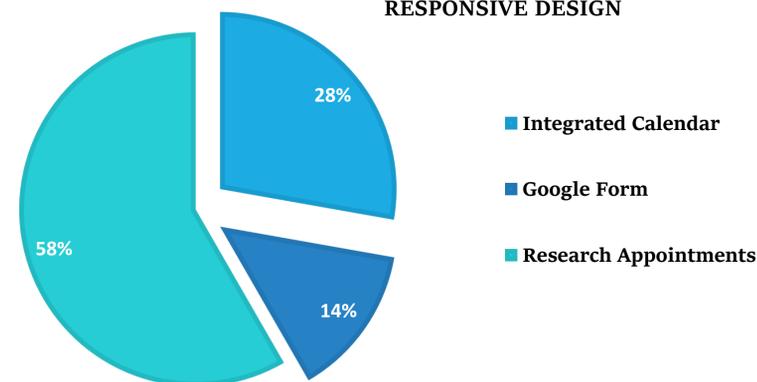
Methods

1. The author selected the universities and colleges because of their membership in the University System of Georgia.
2. Then they searched each university and college website's homepage for the location of the links to the academic libraries' homepage.
3. The author recorded how many hovers, links, and clicks to reach the library's homepage.
4. In the following data, a "hover" counts as the same as a click as it is an action required to reveal information.
5. The author located the Research Assistance or Library Instruction services on the library's homepage and recorded the number of clicks or hovers to that path.
6. Lastly, the author recorded the forms of the responsive design.
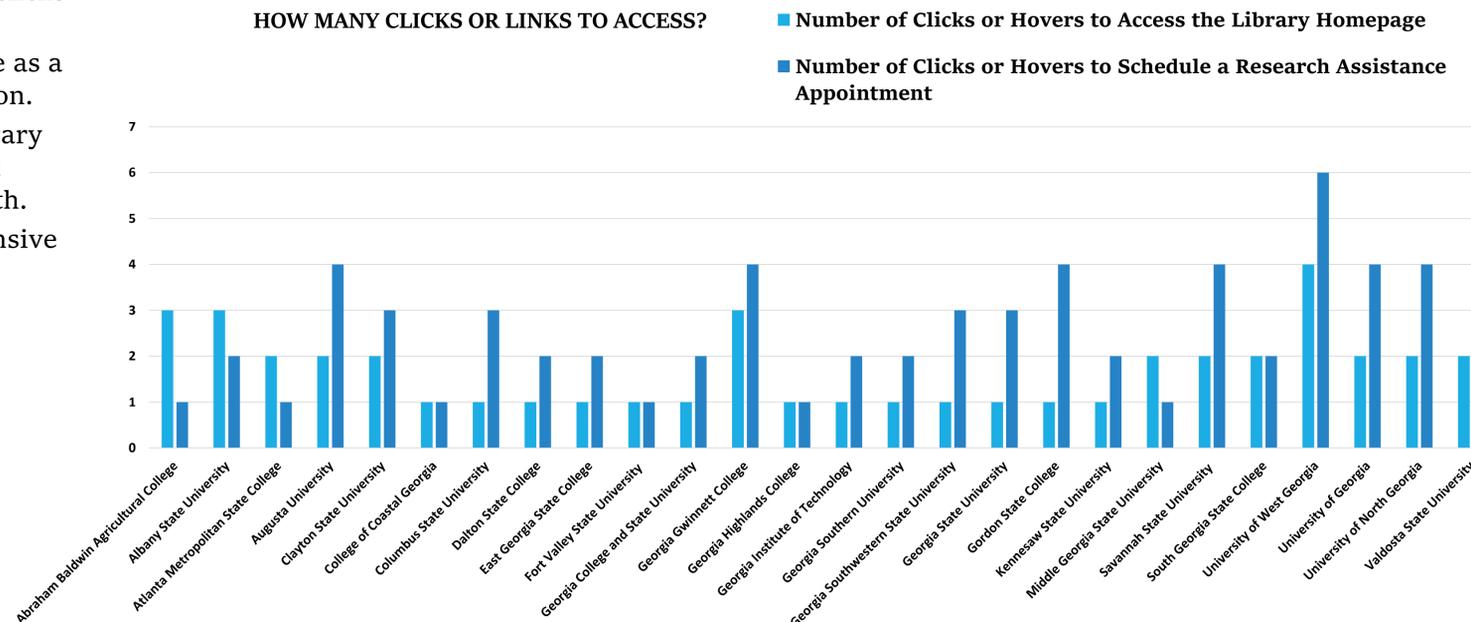7. To compile the research data collected, the author utilized an excel spreadsheet.

LIBRARY HOMEPAGE LINKS ON UNIVERSITY HOMEPAGE

- Tabbed Link
- Link found with Scrolling
- Link found with Clicking or Hovering on Other Tabs or Links

Values: 4%, 46%, 50%

RESPONSIVE DESIGN

- Integrated Calendar
- Google Form
- Research Appointments

Values: 28%, 14%, 58%

HOW MANY CLICKS OR LINKS TO ACCESS?

- Number of Clicks or Hovers to Access the Library Homepage
- Number of Clicks or Hovers to Schedule a Research Assistance Appointment

Bar chart categories: Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College, Albany State University, Atlanta Metropolitan State College, Augusta University, Clayton State University, College of Coastal Georgia, Columbus State University, Dalton State College, East Georgia State College, Fort Valley State University, Georgia College and State University, Georgia Gwinnett College, Georgia Highlands College, Georgia Institute of Technology, Georgia Southern University, Georgia Southwestern State University, Georgia State University, Gordon State College, Kennesaw State University, Middle Georgia State University, Savannah State University, South Georgia State College, University of West Georgia, University of Georgia, University of North Georgia, Valdosta State University

Flowchart: Library Link Locations → Navigational Paths to Library Assistance → Responsive Design

Results

- The study finds that the library link was located on the university or college's homepage 13 out of the 26 (50%) websites reviewed.
- 13 out of 26 (50%) library homepages were accessible with only one click or link. 4 out of 26 (15.3%) library homepages were accessible with three or more clicks or links.
- The average number of clicks or links to schedule a research consultation was three clicks or links.
- 21 library websites included links to information for research appointments. 5 of those sites had Google Forms in their responsive design, and 10 included integrated calendars in scheduling.

Conclusions

This study sought to determine how such content is organized, presenting a navigation pattern for academic libraries to consider, and possibly follow. The author concludes that academic libraries should consider accessibility and responsive design during this Post COVID-19 era when reorganizing their websites.

With the prevalence of online education, a library's homepage exists as the first point of access for patrons to information literacy and much more. Library websites' framework should provide immediate context so that patrons are aware of their location while on sites. The design should then balance utility and direct access to make for a clear and helpful online library experience.

References

University System of Georgia, https://www.usg.edu/news/usgfacts

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