Focus Group: graduate-and-international.uark.edu

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Executive Summary

Navigation

Four out of five participants were able to locate the website quickly. The navigation, however, differed for participants. Two participants used the search function on uark.edu, two participants clicked on academics and then navigated to the website through uark.edu, one participant used Google and one participant used the graduate link at the bottom of the homepage. Not one participant went directly to the website.

Four out of five participants had difficulty locating the 2016 thesis/dissertation submission deadline and two participants gave up and used the uark search function.

Three out of five participants agreed that a checklist should be prominent on the website. All participants agree that a calendar closer to graduation – consisting of final steps – would be helpful.

All participants agreed that all of the necessary information exists on this website, but the information is difficult to find.

Recommendations

- Conduct SEO and keyword research to determine how users are navigating to the Graduate School website. See Appendix A.
- Create a checklist for incoming students and current students. Be sure to include important deadlines and consider creating a portal to this information from the homepage.
- Conduct a usability test to improve navigation considering all participants agreed that information was difficult to locate on the website.

Content

All participants agreed that deadlines for first year, middle year and final year should be prominent and would be very helpful.

All participants agreed that the website is missing information on deadlines.

Multiple participants made the comment throughout the focus group that the content of the website seems very tailored to prospective students and not toward current students.
Multiple participants agreed that featuring content about a graduate student or research conducted would provide an incentive to return to the website.

One participant suggested highlighting an event of the week with free food.

**Recommendations**

- Refer to the previous section about the importance of deadlines.
- Create content tailored to current students as well as prospective students. Feature stories on students and research are two items the participants said they wanted to see.
- Provide clear information about scholarships and funding. This can be incorporated as an action item on the homepage.

**Social Media and Email Marketing**

All participants agreed news – pertaining to graduate students and research – as well as information about deadlines would be helpful.

One participant suggested highlighting an event of the week with free food.

**Recommendations**

- Integrate news and research stories with social media to drive more traffic to the Graduate School website.
- Include events and opportunities for free food and organizations students can become involved with on social media.

**Detailed Findings**

**Action:** Navigate to the graduate school website.

**Question:** How did you choose to navigate to the website? Was the website easy or difficult to locate? When you applied to the graduate school, how did you find the website?

00:02:57
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- Four out of five participants found the website quickly.
- Participant #5 went to the homepage, clicked on academics and then graduate school.
  Participant #4 did the same.
- Two out of five participants used the uark.edu search option.
- Participant #1 used Google to find the website.
- Participant #3 used the Graduates link at the bottom of the uark.edu website.
- All participants went to uark.edu first before trying other options.

Action: Find the fall 2016 thesis/dissertation submission deadline.

Question: How did you navigate to the deadline? Was this easy or difficult to locate? What made it easy or difficult to locate?

00:08:06

- It took all participants a little while to find this information.
- Participant #5 never found the information. He went to the website expecting to find a calendar of important dates but never found it.
- Two participants tried to navigate through the graduate website but gave up and just used uark.edu search option.
- One participant was familiar with the website, knew where the deadline was toward the end of the semester and Googled it.
- One participant used the uark.edu search for Fall 2016 dissertation deadline.
- One participant stated that if you know the structure of the website it is easy but not knowing makes it difficult.
- Participant #3 stated that international students don’t know the uark.edu website process. Knowing what you are looking for would be easier. Perhaps a section to the calendar would help.
• Participant #5 stated that a tab would be helpful. All participants agree.
• Participant #3 stated that a checklist exists but they just don’t know how to find it. It is listed on the academic calendar under the registrar tab.
• Participant #2 stated that there was no link on the site to academic calendar.
• Participant #4 stated that grad students tend to look at the calendar the closer they are to graduation. Suggested that both keywords and a link to the academic calendar would be very helpful. All participants agree.
• Participants #2, #3 and #5 agree that the checklist should be more prominent on the site.
• All participants agree that a calendar would be helpful especially closer to graduation.

Action: Find the graduate school application deadline for the spring semester.

Question: Was finding this information difficult?
00:21:18
• Participant #1 found it easy to find and only took him about 10 seconds. Went from graduate study tab to application deadline.
• Participant #2 went to the graduate page and then clicked on the catalog which he remembered from a previous experience.
• Three out of five participants found the application deadline easy to find.
• Participant #3 never found the application deadline.

Question: How do you think this task could be made easier?
00:23:53
• Participant #3 suggested a tab on the side navigation for deadlines.
• All participants agreed that a link to deadlines or a checklist on the homepage would be helpful.
• Participant #4 suggested website orientation. Participant #2 agreed. Participant #1 agreed but stated that it should be short.
• Participant #2 stated that different levels of students have different reasons for going to the website.
• Participant #5 stated that he never goes to the website but likes the idea of an email with important info updates.

Would you all find orientation for this website helpful?
00:33:06

• Participant #3 feels basic website info might be helpful at orientation.
• Participant #2 suggested a sheet of website info at orientation. Participant #4 agreed but stated that many students may not read it or save it.
• Participant #5 suggested tabs for first year students, middle year and final year would be helpful that included different information and deadlines. All participants agreed that organizing information for the different levels of students would be helpful.

Question: How would you rank the importance of navigation, thesis/dissertation deadline, application and thesis form in order? What kind of content do you feel would be most helpful?
00:38:47

• Participant #5 stated that from the graduate school’s perspective, it feels like the most important thing to them is to apply which is apparent because that is the easiest thing to find. But from a graduate student’s perspective, you want to finish which seems to be a low priority.
• Participant #3 had no suggestions other than that they can see everything great on the website except for deadlines.
• Participant #3 suggested a video with a short website overview would be helpful maybe including deadlines.
• Participant #2 suggested an app for info or events might be helpful.
• Participant #5 noted that they have to go through the graduate school as well as their department to see deadlines. Integrating that would be helpful or even a link on the department sites to the graduate school site. Participant #2 and #3 agreed.

Question: What is your impression of the website?
00:44:38

• Participant #5 stated that they don’t have an opinion other than that the website is generic and that they have to dig for info. Tiles of info would be better that click to links instead of information overload on the homepage.
• Participant #2 suggested a ticker with info or events might be helpful.
• Participant #1 wants to see more information and less photos with events, application deadlines, etc. As future student would like to see appealing info.
• Participant #5 doesn’t want information overload but clicks or links to read more if I want to.

Question: After viewing the content, what, to you, is the purpose of this website?
00:49:39

• Participant #5 feels like the website is specifically designed to look like a competitive ‘Top 50’ institution so we are interested in applying.
• Participant #4 feels like the website is well designed and professional.
• Participant #2 suggested more photos. Participant #4 agreed.
• Participant #5 stated that he wanted info but the website seemed focused only on attracting new students when all he needs are deadlines that can be merged with photos. Participant #1 agreed.
• Participant #3 stated that the website had a good balance.

Question: Does the purpose satisfy your needs or expectations?
00:52:53
• Two out of five participants said the website satisfied their needs.
• Participant #3 says everything except deadlines.
• Two out of five participants stated that the info was all there but was difficult to find.
• Participant #5 agreed that the info is all there but hard to find. It would be helpful if important dates were moved to left navigation and more information was given. All participants agreed.
• Participant #1 suggested listing main items in the left navigation and perhaps a calendar for dates. Participant #4 agreed.

Question: How often do you visit this website?
00:55:59
• Two participants stated that they only visit the website when they need it...usually for deadlines, applications, scholarships, etc.
• Two participants stated that they visit maybe two times a semester.
• Participant #5 stated that they used the website all of the time as a new student but rarely use it now.

Question: Do you most often visit this site from a desktop, smartphone or tablet?
00:58:41
• All participants prefer the desktop because it is easier to navigate the site.

Question: What are some reasons you visit this site?
01:00:13
• Participant #4 stated that they visit the site for scholarships, faculty info and courses.
• Participant #2 stated that they visit the site for requirements, procedures and the catalog.
Participant #3 stated that they visit the site for scholarships, graduation info and language resources for international students.

Question: Is there too little or missing information?
01:04:41

All participants agreed that the website is missing information on deadlines.

Question: What content would bring you back to the website?
01:04:59

Participant #2 said that stories about people would bring them back.
Participant #5 suggested info about food or an event of the week highlight with free food.
Participant #3 felt that programs or projects that students could get involved in or perhaps a tab or weekly highlight on research and projects for grad students.
Participant #2 stated that an incentive to come back would be good like a highlight on students in the rotator that linked to a story. Participant #4 agreed.
Participant #4 also stated that storytelling and research would be good and involve students major, success and the project or even a short video showing challenges of students.
Participant #3 stated that info on the top ranked programs at the university would be helpful info for international students looking to apply.

Question: Do you think that stories are more important than deadlines and checklists?
01:15:28

All participants agreed that a combination of importance on deadlines and stories would be helpful.
• Participant #5 suggested a link on the homepage that led to a pdf or more information but not a FAQ. Also that an email option to request more information would be more helpful.

• All participants agreed that including deadlines, checklists, stories, news and social media in a grad school app would be helpful.
Handout One

Demographics

Graduate-and-international.uark.edu/ Focus Group

Participant Demographics

Participant number: ___
Age: ______________
Gender: ____________

Participant type
   a) Student
   b) Staff
   c) Faculty
   d) Other ______________

Familiarity/Involvement with Graduate and International Office:
   a) Not familiar/involved
   b) Slightly familiar/involved
   c) Familiar/involved
   d) Very familiar/involved

How comfortable are you at using the internet:
   a) Very comfortable
   b) Moderately comfortable
   c) Not comfortable
**Participant One**  
Age: 24  
Gender: Male  
Participant type: Student  
Familiarity/Involvement with Sustainability: Slightly familiar/involved  
How comfortable are you at using the internet: Very comfortable

**Participant Two**  
Age: 38  
Gender: Male  
Participant type: Student  
Familiarity/Involvement with Sustainability: Not familiar/involved  
How comfortable are you at using the internet: Very comfortable

**Participant Three**  
Age: 27  
Gender: Female  
Participant type: Graduate  
Familiarity/Involvement with Sustainability: Slightly familiar/involved  
How comfortable are you at using the internet: Very comfortable

**Participant Four**  
Age: 36  
Gender: Male  
Participant type: Student  
Familiarity/Involvement with Sustainability: Slightly familiar/involved  
How comfortable are you at using the internet: Moderately comfortable

**Participant Five**  
Age: 44  
Gender: Male  
Participant type: Student  
Familiarity/Involvement with Sustainability: Very familiar/involved  
How comfortable are you at using the internet: Very comfortable
Research Methods

Research Goal:

To improve website usability for students.

Research Design:

Amanda Cantu recruited the participants for this focus group. The focus group was about one and a half hours in length. This focus group had five participants.

How the Information Will Be Used:

The research will be used for the targeted audience to improve usability on University of Arkansas websites. This includes students, faculty, staff, the Fayetteville community and legislative members. Reports from the findings will be sent to departments, webmasters and be made available on the digital publication WebFirst.

How This Project Fits Into Our Department:

As a content strategist, one main focus of this job is to use qualitative and quantitative data to improve the usability of the University of Arkansas’ websites. Currently, this is accomplished primarily through Google Analytics and the Google Search Console. Focus groups are another piece to the usability puzzle that will create a better user experience. Focus groups allow digital design and development to interact directly and observe students to see how they use University of Arkansas websites and what they would like to see improved. From this information, changes can be implemented after cross-referencing the data from the focus groups with our existing sources of data.

Expected Results:

Based on data accumulated from the Google Search Console for external searches and the Google Search Application for internal search results, we expect the majority of participants will push for changes to be made on both landing and interior pages varying in significance from website to website. Often, search queries collected from the Google Search Console suggest that users are not able to quickly locate information and instead will search for the information.
Why This Method Was Chosen:

The Digital Design and Development team uses Google Analytics, the Google Search Console and the Google Search Application that provide quantitative analysis. So, the Digital Design and Development understands the “what?” question through the data already obtained, but the focus groups will explain the “why?” question. For instance, if a specific page has a high bounce rate, a focus group will essentially act as a real-time heatmap that will provide answers as to why users choose to leave a page or continue on to other internal pages.

Focus Group Agenda:

Thank you all for agreeing to participate in this focus group for the graduate school.

My name is Chad Woodard and I am the Content Strategist for University Relations.

Kelly Bostick will assist me today.

This is a focus group designed to improve the usability of the graduate school. Please feel free to give your honest opinion throughout the course of this focus group as it pertains to the graduate school website.

Guidelines

- There are no right or wrong answers. We value everyone’s opinion as it pertains to handbook.uark.edu.
- We hope to have many opinions throughout this focus group, so speak up if you agree or disagree.
- We would like everyone to participate. You could be called on if you have not spoken often.
- We will be video recording this focus group. We will not call you by your name and you will remain anonymous in our report.

Action Item Questions: 45 Minutes

Navigate to the graduate school website. How did you choose to navigate to the website? Was the website easy or difficult to locate? When you applied to the graduate school how did you find the website?

Find the fall 2016 thesis/dissertation submission deadline. How did you navigate to the deadline? Was this easy or difficult to locate? What made it easy or difficult to locate?
Find the graduate school application deadline for the spring semester. Was finding this information difficult? If so, how could this task be made easier?

Find the master’s student thesis title form. Were you able to find this information? Was the terminology confusing? If so, what would you call this?

Ranking all three action items, with one being the most important and three being the least important, how would you rank the importance of these items?

**General Questions: 45 Minutes**

1. What is your impression of this website?
2. After viewing the content, what, to you, is the purpose of this website?
3. Does this purpose satisfy your needs or expectations?
4. How often do you visit this website?
5. Do you most often visit this site from a desktop, smartphone or tablet?
6. What are some reasons you visit this website?
7. Does the content match your reasons for visiting this website? If not, what content do you expect to find?
8. Are you able to easily find information you are looking for? If not, is there too much, too little or missing information?
9. What are some positive experiences of this website and what made these experiences positive?
10. Was there anything about this website you found confusing?
11. Is this website easy or difficult to navigate and what makes it easy or difficult to navigate?
12. What suggestions do you have to improve this website?
13. What content would bring you back to this website?
14. Would you be interested in a social media feed of graduate school content on the homepage?
15. Is there anything we have not discussed pertaining to this website that you think should be addressed?

**Strategy for Analysis**

After the focus group, the responses will be gathered and transcribed from an audio and video capture. From here, comments from the participants, as well as nonverbal communication, will be tracked to reveal common themes about the experience of the particular website in the focus group. The data, once transcribed and grouped by theme and trend, will be cross-referenced with Google Search Console to find common themes. A written report will then be
created after the common themes from all of the resources are compiled. The written reports will provide recommendations for change based on the findings from the focus groups and the other data tools. Each question asked will be addressed in the written report and contain themes and trends with quantitative data from Google Search Console. The recommendations will be sent to the departments and webmasters to implement the changes. The results of this analysis will also be made available on the digital publication WebFirst.

**Specifications for Time and Location**

The focus group took place at 9:30 a.m., September 23, in room A354 in the Arkansas Union. The room consisted of computers for the participants and the ability to project the website onto a larger screen.

**Who Fulfilled the Leadership Roles of the Focus Group?**

Amanda Cantu gathered the participants for this focus group. Chad Woodard led the focus group and interviewed the participants. Kelly Bostick took notes of nonverbal communication of the participants during the focus groups. Kelly Bostick transcribed the responses from the participants. Chad Woodard and Kelly Bostick grouped the information into common themes and trends for the written report as well as published a report of the findings on WebFirst.
Appendix A

Google Search Console

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<th>Queries</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
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</table>

The Google Search Console provides what search queries a person used to reach graduate-and-international.uark.edu. A search query is a search entered in a search engine, such as Google, that leads the user to the search engine results page.

Definition of categories in the report:

**Clicks**: The number of people who visited graduate-and-international.uark.edu based on a specific query.

**Impressions**: The number of people who saw graduate-and-international.uark.edu as an option based on a search query in the Google search engine results page.

**CTR (Click Through Rate)**: The number of clicks divided by the number of impressions.

This data highlights search queries that have a low click-through rate for the graduate school website. This data shows that many common search queries for the graduate school do not lead to user engagement. Improving the use of these keywords on the website will increase the ranking of the website and lead to more engagement from users.