

University English Department: Donor Interaction and Website Improvements

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Executive Summary

Introduction

The purpose of this report is to answer the question of “What do current and prospective donors of USU want to do or find on the English Department website?” by giving an analysis of previous and recently collected data. To obtain this data, a literature review was conducted to collect past research, two think-aloud sessions and two interviews were conducted with donors, and a survey with pertinent questions was sent out through the English Department Newsletter.

Pattern of Findings

Through first-hand research gathered by conducting a survey, interviews, and think aloud study which were given to those who had previously donated to the Utah State University English department, we were able to determine the donors' uses of and thoughts on the website. Both parties found themselves investigating specific departments and scholarships where their donations could be applied to. While the site was usable, some participants thought that the structure was outdated in its design with too many words and descriptive text, and would have enjoyed seeing more images and graphics. Others conversely desired more information on topics that appeared on the site that weren't explained or understandable as they read them. While some donors were more pleased with the existing website than others, all suggested at least a few changes that could be made to improve the website during the upcoming website revision.

Recommendations

Considering the participants, their responses, and other data collected during research, it is highly recommended that the following is considered during the development of the new English Department website. These recommendations are the most important suggestions from this study, however, a complete list containing additional suggestions can be found at the end of this document:

- Highlight the benefits of donating via emails, social media, and other means.
- Include a web page that highlights social activities and/or provides special recognition to multi-generational families of graduates.
- Consider offering some form of incentive to those who donate through the website by creating a donor highlight section on the Giving page.
- Ensure that the website's privacy policy is clearly accessible near the donation portal.
- Include more pictures on the Giving and Publications/Media page showcasing how donor contributions are helping the department.
- Reprogram the main navigation bar to remain stationary at the top of the page so that users can easily access it even when scrolling down.
- Create a page of current events happening in the department to help inform current donors and inspire prospective donors.

Problem Statement

Description

USU's English Department is in the process of reviewing their website. The goal of this project is to identify the needs and preferences of current donors so that the website receives increased donor traffic, offers better service to its visitors (namely donors), and encourages those visitors to donate to the English Department website. This research serves to answer the question: "What do current donors want to do or find on the English Department's Website?"

This project benefits USU's English Department by revealing areas in need of improvement within the department website in order to better appeal to new donors, long-time donors, and prospective donors. Through this research, changes and suggestions will be provided to the development team working on English Department website revisions. These suggestions will be targeted towards donors and their needs, and if implemented should increase donor activity on the website, as well as increase the amount of donations received through the website.

While the research aims to improve the overall donor experience on the website, any individual browsing the site should benefit from a more refined site because of the overlap of donors and regular users. Students, parents, faculty, and others should all have an improved experience with the site. Changes implemented will further increase the positivity of the browsing experience, and overall viewer retention. Those who will especially benefit will include USU students, faculty, and staff, because of their direct relation to those who would donate. Donors themselves will specifically benefit from a more easily-accessible platform to donate on and an opportunity to see content they may feel has been lacking on the current website more thoroughly represented. The end goal of this research is to improve the website as a whole with a specific focus on donors, hopefully driving more donor traffic to the site and leading to more monetary donations being made to the English Department through the website's "Giving" page.

Upcoming Sections

In order to research our proposed question we plan to utilize various research methods. These include a literature review, interviews, think-aloud protocols, and surveys. Each method will be used in order to gather information guiding our recommendations for changes to the department website. We will use secondary research to synthesize any relevant information concerning what makes a website appealing to an audience. Online surveys will be used to collect data on how audiences feel about the current website. The think-aloud protocol will be used to observe how audiences interact with various versions of the website. Interviews will be conducted with current donors to help us understand what their expectations and motivations are for donating to USU and how the website can play a role in inspiring them to donate.

- *Literature Review*: Examining past research within the context of a secondary research question, "How can we increase the prospective and current donor traffic of the English Department website?", shows us that donor traffic on websites is directly affected by

whether helpful or interesting content exists that motivates users to visit the site, whether users feel secure while browsing the website, and whether users have had an overall positive experience on the site in the past. The articles make mention that it is important to understand your biggest demographic, and in the case of donors, this would most likely be Alumni, who are particularly more likely to visit the website and donate to the college. Website security is a constant battle in our ever evolving age of the internet. Ensuring donors trust by keeping internet security up to date, and privacy policies readily available is something that must be taken into consideration if you want to build a site that receives constant traffic. Improving the online experience for visitors is something that not only benefits donors, but also a large majority of users, and in keeping the site modern looking and feeling, it is expected to bring in more traffic from all types of visitors.

- *Think Aloud*: Sessions conducted with two current donors give insight into our secondary research question, “What do donors find frustrating about the English Department website?” Participants are asked to give their thoughts while browsing the website and asked follow up questions. In particular, we look at participants' responses towards how they navigate the website, the overall aesthetics, and how relatable they find the content.
- *Survey*: The main research subquestion focused on in the survey was, “What is the main motivation for Donors to donate through the English department website?” The survey was a Google Form sent through an English Department newsletter in hopes of reaching current donors. Six participants submitted results to the survey. Questions contained within the survey sought answers to the main subquestion and included questions about the donors demographic (i.e. Alumni, student, organization, business, etc.), how donors spent their time on the website, whether they had used the website to make a donation before, how they learn about the difference their donation has made, and specific recommendations. Findings showed that those who did not make a donation online did not do so because they did not know it was an available option. Donors also gave specific recommendations stating that they would like to see how their donation was making a difference to the English department specifically.
- *Interview*: For our interviews, we were primarily focused on our main question, “What do donors want to find or do on the English Department website?” We asked our two participants if they had interacted with the website previously. Furthermore, we also wanted to find out if donors thought they were being rewarded for their contributions through the website.

Literature Review: University Donor Motivation, Web Security, and Online Experience

Introduction

To increase donations, organizations need a strong, secure, professional website, that helps generate donation awareness and improve the experience of those who donate to the college, or donors. Past research performed by Bradford regarding donor motivation, website security, and online donation experience has shown that all play key roles in the donation process. By improving qualities in these categories, donor activity has been shown to increase (Bradford, 2020). For USU's English Department, updating the sections of the website with the most donor traffic presents an opportunity to improve communications and ultimately increase revenue from donations. This literature review serves the purpose of fulfilling this goal by summarizing past research that will help answer the question of "How can we increase the prospective and current donor traffic of the English Department website?" This in turn should help bring about an understanding of what changes can be made to the site to increase site visits by donors and prospective donors and by extension will maximize donation potential. To this end, the research found focuses on increasing donor motivation to visit the site, ensuring the website is safe and secure, and improving visitors overall online experience.

Increasing Donor Motivation

Identifying your site's target audience and then promoting the site catered to that audience can help generate awareness, which is a vital part of motivating donors to donate to a cause. (Bradford, 2020) Without sufficient awareness that an opportunity to donate exists, donors are unlikely to be attracted. A key step in motivating potential donors is alleviating feelings that donation requires a sacrifice on their part and instead marketing it as an opportunity from which they have something to gain, such as giving back to their community or being recognized for their efforts (Bradford, 2020). Improving USU's English Department website and marketing through highlighting the benefits of donating could lead to an increase of web traffic to the donation page, and subsequently, an increase in donations.

Identifying a clear target audience to market a donation opportunity to can help increase an organization's success at attracting donors. This is done by catering communications to suit the group most likely to donate (Bradford, 2020). In the case of USU, alumni are likely one of the biggest donation groups. Studies have shown that an increase in university extracurricular and social activities ultimately leads to an increase in donations from groups who attend (Durango, 2013). Additionally, multi-generational Alumni have been shown to be a deeply emotionally invested group, with a high giving potential, and will give in higher amounts and more frequently than 1st generational Alumni (Edmonson, 1970).

Another factor that influences donor motivation is economic growth and recession. Studies have shown that donors are more likely to donate when they feel they have the additional resources to do so, this being magnified when they see universities needing financial support (Brown, J. R., & Hoxby, C. M. , 2014). Even during a financial recession, donors are still likely to donate if they feel the university needs the charitable donations to sustain itself.

Understanding the ebb and flow of economics both locally and nationally, combined with what visitors may see on the website, could be interpreted as a way to further increase donor activity on the website.

Ensuring Website Security

As Utah State continues to maintain an up-to-date secure donation portal on their website, a more positive and lasting relationship will be formed between the University and its Donors and bring about a bond of trust and security (Boylan, 2010). There is still the possibility of users who won't use the website because it requires them to input their personal information. To further understand how to influence these types of users, research was conducted to observe the influence of incentives on the willingness of users to provide their personal and financial information. Three areas were tested including; travel, financial, and health care, all of which required the same information input and were tested with participants being randomly assigned to one of the three groups. Results showed that incentives increased the chances of a person giving out their personal information. Users in the study were also shown to value privacy policies (L-Horn Hann, 2007). Understanding these studies, and some user habits help highlight the importance of creating a more professional and secure website to build a positive relationship of trust with Donors which will in turn lead to an increase of site traffic, and donations.

Improving Online Experience

The delicate trust in a donor and organization relationship stems mostly from the donors experiences with the organization. With new technology capabilities, many organizations are taking donations in a secure online form. This has created the need for organizations to constantly be improving donors' online experience to ensure that they can effectively interact with the website (Nageswarakurukkal, 2020). From an organization's perspective, improving online experience by investing in information technology and online communication resources helps create a strong relationship with donors (Nageswarakurukkal, 2020). Maintaining a website that is up-to-date and easy to use is a vital part of promoting an organization in need of donations and also helps in making donating look like an attractive opportunity for potential donors. Without a good way to communicate, promote, and build awareness of a need for donations, it will be difficult to bring in new donors (Bradford, 2020). Improving online platforms can lead to an increase of activity, and these changes can take various forms; such as updating web standards and information, and centering site content on the organization's activities, projects, mission, and vision (Nageswarakurukkal, 2020). These improvements directly affect site traffic, donation awareness, and online donation experience, which are key to increasing donations (Choi, 2019). According to Nageswarakurukkal (2020), an organization's website should be user friendly, web efficient, and attractive to ensure that online users, including donors, can effectively interact with the website. (Nageswarakurukkal, 2020; Garrett, 2016)

Recommendations

Providing donors of the USU English Department with these necessary elements of motivation, security, and improved experience will further build strong, professional relationships between the parties and have the potential to increase site traffic, donations, donor experience, and will help to create long-lasting and positive relationships based upon trust. It is strongly recommended that the English Department consider these following recommendations gained from these articles:

- *Motivation*
 - Improve USU's English Department website and marketing through highlighting the benefits of donating via emails, social media, and other means.
 - Include a web page that highlights social activities and/or provides special recognition to multi-generational families of graduates
 - Understand the ebb and flow of economics both locally and nationally to know the best times to ask for donations
 - Consider giving some form of incentive to those who donate
- *Security*
 - Ensure that the privacy policy is clearly accessible near the donation portal
 - Ensure that the donation portal, and any user information that is submitted through there, is secure
- *Online Experience*
 - Improve online platforms overall, such as updating web standards and information, and create pages that center on an organization's activities, projects, mission, and vision.
 - Perform enough user testing with the new site to know that it is both web efficient and attractive to those that visit.

Think-Aloud: University Donor Online Experience and Frustrations

Research Question

For the Think-Aloud study, we focused mainly on one sub-question: “What do donors find frustrating about using the English Department website?” Understanding the thought processes of donors, specifically if they have any poor interactions, helped us to focus on making a more user-friendly site for donors and other site visitors. It also helped us to better identify the experience that donors are seeking on the website. Specifically, we looked for input on website navigation, overall aesthetics, and reliability of content.

Recruiting Approach

In order to recruit participants, we planned to connect with contacts through our client, Ben Gunsberg. We also planned to ask some of his contacts on the Development Board who helped develop the website and frequently interact with donors for any potential participants. We also included an optional question at the end of our survey which asks if survey participants would like to participate in the study beyond the survey in a think-aloud, or regular interview. During the session, we had two group members, Evans and Kimber, act as note takers. They filled out our team's note taking form, as well as took notes of any additional insights that might be helpful in answering our research question. Strate will act as gofer and problem solver. Fritschle will act as prompter throughout the entire sessions.

Pattern of Findings

We were able to conduct two Think-Aloud sessions over Zoom with different current donor participants. The following tables below are our notes taken during the sessions. Namely we were looking for insight on the websites overall navigation, aesthetics, and reliable content. The first task given to participants was a free roam of the website. Participants were given 5 minutes to browse the website looking for any content they wished to see before answering follow up questions.

	Participant #1	Participant #2
Navigation	The participant clicked on several pages but didn't seem to be looking for any specific content.	The participant said that it was “easy” to navigate to what they wanted to see and understand. They mostly seemed focused on skimming the home page.
Aesthetics	Found that the overall look didn't give them any incentive to go further.	Found the look to be very inviting. Particularly liked the highlighting and sectioning as very useful and inviting

Content	Wanted something more familiar and a better introduction to the department. More tradition or pictures of old main/ old merrill. Found the content not relevant to Alumni donors. Kept saying there needed to be a section on “Why study English”	Showed them everything they wanted to see. No further comments.
Other	The participant mentioned that people need to learn how to read and write which is the core of the English Department. They said that that was not something reflected in the overall website.	They were comfortable donating through the website and that it was a fairly easy process

Task #1 Free Roam

Overall the participants had mixed reviews about the website during the Free Roam. Participant number #2 found the overall aesthetic of the website to be “inviting” and very easy to navigate. On the other hand, participant #1 had minor difficulties navigating the website and seemed to get bored of the website fairly quickly. Participant #1 also commented that they wished there was more content relevant to Alumni donors, which he represented. In particular, they wished for a more traditional aesthetic along with pictures of historic on-campus sites.

For the second task of the session, participants were asked to go to the Giving Page. The Giving page is where donors can make a “gift” to the department. It allows donors to choose specifically where their donation is going along with how much. Our participants were asked to read through the contents of the page while giving insights to their thought process and then followed up with the same questions.

	Participant #1	Participant #2
Navigation	Took the participant about 10 seconds to find. The participant mentioned that they wished there was a direct link at the bottom of the home page so that it puts the user directly to the Giving Page.	The participant found it easy to find the page and pull up from the home page.

Aesthetics	Specifically he wanted more pictures and less “blocky” text. Wanted something more “familiar”	The participant commented that it was “very well done” and didn’t have any changes to suggest.
Content	Wishes that they could see where the donated money was going and what exactly it was being used for. They mentioned that those changes would make them more likely to remain a consistent donor.	The participant found the page very helpful in explaining giving choices. Liked the first part on “why to give”. They did want to see more of the effects of the gifts and how the donations were being used.
Other	Emphasis security, was a little bit hesitant about donating through the site.	Felt their information was safe. Commented that the process was very easy.

Task #2 Giving Page

Again, we noticed that both participants were able to find the page without direction, however, participant #1 did have minor issues. Participant #1 also did mention again a lack of invitation for Alumni donors. They also found the overall “blocky” text to be hard to read, on the other hand, participant #2 enjoyed reading through the page. Though, both participants did express a desire to see how their donations were contributing to the department reflected on this particular page. They both mentioned that this would be useful for gaining more prospective donors. The participants also had varying opinions on the security of the page. Participant #1 mentioned that based on the look of the website they were a bit hesitant to donate through it due to the lack of emphasis on security. On the other side, participant #2 held no such reservations and commented that when they had used the site in the past the process to donate was relatively easy.

The third and final task given to the participants was to go to and read the Publications and Media page. This particular page was chosen since a majority of the areas an online donor can give to through the Giving Page are briefly summarized here. Participants were asked to speak their thoughts aloud while browsing through the page and then asked the same follow up questions.

	Participant #1	Participant #2
Navigation	They found the publications/media page a little less accessible but still	Commented that it was easy to find the page and navigate.

	easy enough to find.	
Aesthetics	They found the publications/media page to be good overall. The participant didn't dislike anything about the look.	The participant liked how short and to the point it was. Not too wordy and easy to skim.
Content	On the media/publications page he found the content to be a little more confusing. The participant wanted more clarity on the purpose of the page. "It reads weird to me" Some things on there were dated. They would like to see it updated/kept up to date.	Mentioned that the page gives a lot of information in a successfully short way. Participant wanted a link to more examples on the category (i.e. the creative writing section showcasing some student work to read)
Other	No additional comments.	No additional comments.

Task #3 Publications and Media

Again, both participants had different experiences navigating to the Publications and Media page. Participant #1 was able to find this page with minor issues while #2 found it instantly. Both participants found the content of this page to be lacking. Participant #1 even saying that they didn't understand the purpose of the page. Participant #2 particularly wanted to see more links and examples on the listed categories. Specifically, they mentioned a desire to see some student work showcased under the Creative Writing section.

Recommendations

After sessions with the participants of the Think Aloud, we suggest the following ways in which to improve the English department website.

In regards to navigation, we acknowledge that the current navigation bar is effective, however, some participants had trouble finding it after scrolling down through various pages. Thus, we recommend that the navigation bar be stationary and always stay at the top of the page. This would allow the users to always be able to access and navigate the site regardless of where they are on a certain page. We also recommend that the website overall contain more pictures. We specifically recommend including pictures of current department events to showcase how donations are contributing to the university. This will help current donors see how they are helping the department while also inspiring prospective donors. Further, this will help the websites flow better, and look more appealing.

Lastly, we recommend that the bottom of the Giving page should include a brief summary, either by a link or otherwise, on the security of online donations. Trust is one of the

fundamentals between a donor and organization and as such complete transparency on the security should be easily accessible.

Survey: University Donor Motivation

Research Question

The purpose of our research was to provide Donor feedback in regards to our primary research question, “What do current donors want to do/find on the English Department website?” With this in mind, the main subquestion focused upon in the survey segment of the research was: “What is the main motivation for donors to donate through the English Department’s website?” By focusing on this specifically with the survey, we gained insight into the preferences and opinions of those who currently donate to USU. This information feeds into our primary research question about what donors want to find/do on the website, and helps us better understand why donors have been visiting the English website, and why they’re donating. Understanding these habits is essential in understanding what recommendations to give to our client in order to drive more donor-based traffic to the website.

Recruiting and Data Collection Methods

For our survey, we opted to use Google Forms as our distribution method. The survey was distributed via email in the English Department Newsletter, which has a broad reach of alumni, faculty, students, and staff, all of whom could be within our range of prospective or current donors. Survey questions were focused upon, “What is the main motivation for donors to donate through the website?” with a wide range of questions to seek information regarding this subquestion. Some of these included: the participants background with Utah State University, what they had used the English Department website for, and their experience donating to Utah State University through the English Department website. Responses to the survey were completely anonymous. In total, six responses were generated providing feedback as to what the Donor experience is with the current English Department website.

Pattern of Findings

The following data displays represent the responses we have received. Data displays are not in the same order as the questions in the survey. They have been grouped in accordance to how relevant they are to one another. In total we received 6 responses from various alumni, a business, and current students.

From Exhibit 1 we learn that the majority of our survey participants are either students; or Alumni, and by cross referencing Exhibit 2, we can infer that the reason this subset of individuals visit the English Department website, is mainly because they’re looking for helpful information. Furthermore, some of these responses in Exhibit 2 could be because the user was looking for specific information that they could not find, which resulted in them visiting a majority of the pages. This will be further explored in Think-aloud sessions. In Exhibits 3 and 4, we see two users who commented about their frustrations with not being able to find out about current events. Based upon this finding, it’s our recommendation that future revisions of the

website make it easier for users to find out about current events. A suggestion to accomplish this would be to put events, or links to the events, on the front page. Future iterations of the page should keep in mind that donors who use the website will largely be Alumni and Students, so we recommend that useful links and information pertinent to them is easily accessible on the front page, or on their own easy to browse and access page.

Do you represent any of the following?
6 responses

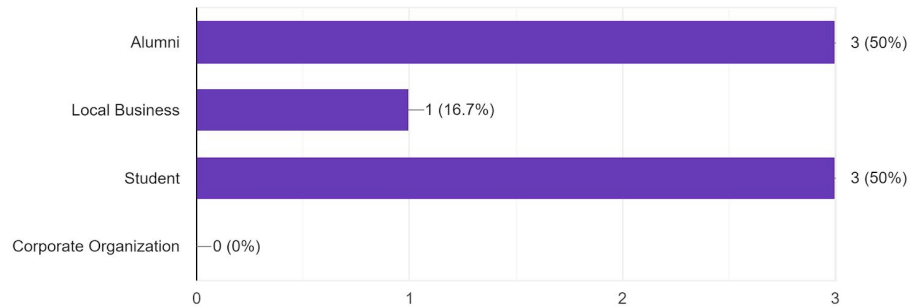


Exhibit 1

Please describe how you've spent time on the website. Have you:
3 responses

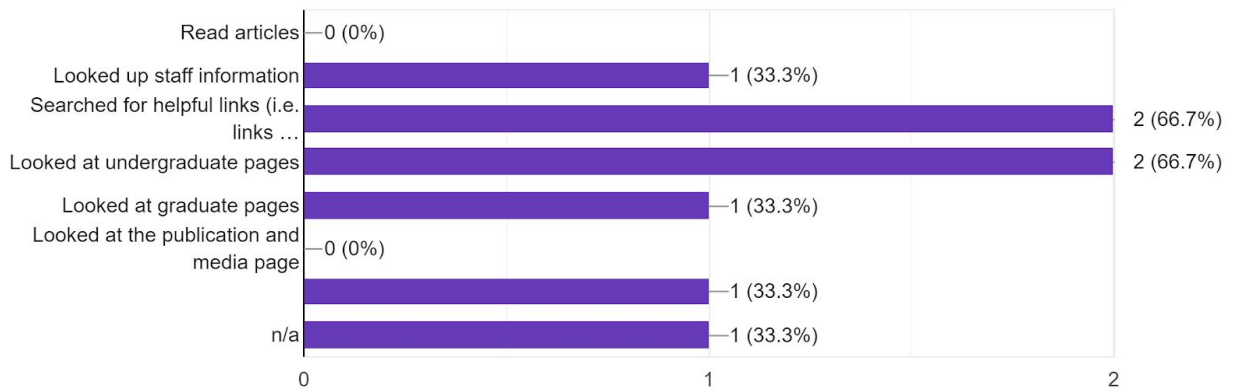


Exhibit 2

What do you dislike about the English Department Website?

2 responses

I couldn't find all the links I needed. Specifically information on the Digital Folklore Project or other places of donation.

It is a bit hard to find current events going on.

Exhibit 3

What additional information would you like to see on the English department website?

1 response

It would be nice to see what current events are going on and how my donation contributed to the Digital Folklore Project.

Exhibit 4

We also asked participants how they were learning about the difference their contributions were making. Further questioning asked if they had donated through the USU English Department website, specifically through the current 'Giving' page (see Exhibits 5 and 6.)

In Exhibit 6, we can see that 5 out of 6 respondents learn about how their donation will help USU via email newsletters. Yet in Exhibit 6, we see that 4 of our applicants did not know that they could donate online. We highly recommend that the department reminds donors in their newsletters, about the process of donating online. This would streamline the donation process for the users, and drive more traffic to the website. Further, it may be beneficial to the English Department if the website itself had a link to donate that was more apparent to browsers. Due to our results, we must question the effectiveness of the 'Giving' page in attracting new prospective donors. This will also be further explored in think-aloud sessions.



Exhibit 5

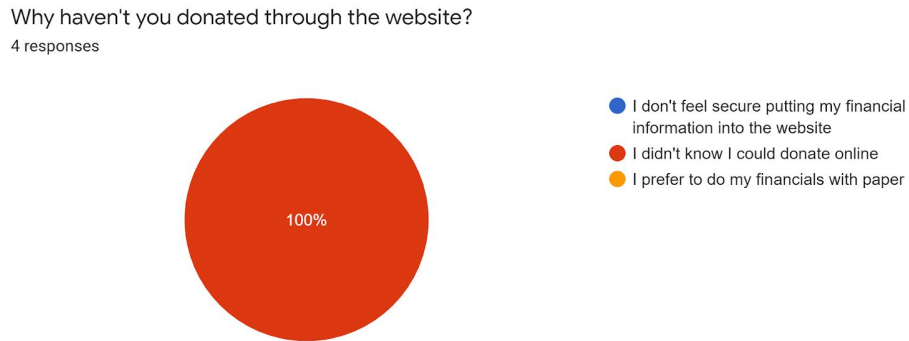


Exhibit 6

In Exhibit 7, we see that all the participants wanted to support the department/university in some capacity. While the response varied, they all donated in order to support or give back.

What was your motivation behind donating?

6 responses

I wanted to support usu Greek community

I wanted to support my children's place of education.

Wanted to support the school I graduated from and my place of work.

Wanted to give back

I wanted to support the Digital Folklore Project.

Exhibit 7

Recommendations

Overall, our data shows that Alumni, businesses, and students are active donors. Further, we have found that these groups of donors are visiting the USU English Department website in order to find relevant information, such as; scholarships, staff, undergraduate, and graduate information. Based upon this finding, it would be beneficial to the department to include easy to navigate and use pages containing this information. As inferred by our participants, the current pages containing this information are either too hard to locate or not sufficient enough. Also, as suggested by two participants, we would recommend that the English Department include a page containing current events. This would enable donors to see what is happening in the department they donated to and how they can get more involved with the university.

The data also shows that many of the participants were unaware that they had the option to donate online. In this case, we would recommend that the option to donate online is more prominently displayed across the site where appropriate. In addition, it is recommended that the 'Giving' page be revised to include visualization and relevant information on how donations are being used within the department. For example, one participant mentioned that they were unable to find sufficient information on the Digital Folklore Project. In this case, we would recommend including a section below the link to the online donation page that contained a brief summary of the various places one can donate to, such as the Digital Folklore Project. Pictures and various visual representations should be used to showcase how current donors are helping the department. This would help encourage prospective donors and recognize the contributions of previous donors.

It must also be noted that only a total 6 participants took part in the survey. Any and all recommendations will be further explored in our think-aloud and interview sessions. However, it is important to recognize that these survey results do provide a foundation in defining our donor audience and their motivations behind donating.

Interviews: University Online Donation Awareness and Rewards

Research Question

In conducting interviews we were primarily looking for answers to our main research question, “What do donors want to do or find when visiting the English department website?” Over the course of the interviews, we focused our questions on what the donors specifically want to find on the website. If they did not donate through the website, we asked whether they knew there was a website, and how the English Department could promote the website so that it could become more well-known. Further, we asked questions targeted towards our subquestion, “How are donors rewarded for their contributions and is there a way for donors to feel more rewarded through the website?” and “What is the main motivation for donors to donate through the USU English Department's website?” Donors were asked to provide feedback for the rewards they have received, what they would like to see in the future, and what the donation meant to them personally.

Recruiting Approach

Contact with donors willing to be interviewed was made through our correspondents on the Development Board. Our contact made introduction emails with the whole team and the participant through emails linked together. From there, the research team reached out to the possible participants and sent them the handout detailing the purpose of the study and informing them of what their contribution to the study would be. Attached was our Letter of Information. If they agreed to participate, a date and time were then scheduled to meet using Zoom. The participants remained anonymous, their name and identity not being shared with the public.

Interview Protocols

All interviews were conducted over a scheduled Zoom meeting. Members in attendance included: Kimber as the interviewer, Strate as gofer, Evans and Fritschle as note takers, and the respondent. Participants were given the Letter of Information and the handout below (sent to them over email as well as read to them before the interview began). The survey was conducted by the interviewer asking questions and the responder providing answers. Sessions took roughly 15 minutes to complete. These interviews were semi-structured with pre-planned questions as well as any on the spot questions that the interviewer felt were relevant to the current session.

Patterns of Findings

In general, interview subjects had little familiarity with the website besides briefly browsing it in preparation for the interview itself. Even longtime donors seemed unaware that donating online was a possibility prior to speaking with the researchers. While the response to the existing content on the web pages, specifically including the “Giving” page, was not overtly negative, there was a general consensus that the pages were overly wordy with little to draw the reader in or get them excited to read. As one subject stated, “ my first reaction is there’s a lot of text... it doesn’t pull you in.” (Participant 1, 2020) Researchers noted the desire of donors to see

examples of how their money was being used by the English department showcased on the website. When asked whether they would like to be specifically recognized on the website, the response was more in favor of seeing how money being donated was helping students and programs rather than a shout out to the donor themselves.

Subjects did not express any concerns that the website seemed unsafe. The general consensus was that donors felt secure donating via the online form; however, a comment was made that it would be more appealing to have a donation page that leads to the English Department specifically, rather than rerouting the user to a page for donating to CHASS as a whole.

Implications

While respondents were open to the idea of donating online, they found the website itself to be lacking in content that inspired them to do so. The website should be revised to make it more readable and enjoyable for the browser. In general, and especially for high profile donors, there is an interest in seeing how donation money is benefiting real students and programs in USU's English Department. Donors are more interested in web content that draws the reader in and makes them excited about the English Department and what it has to offer. As many donors are alumni who graduated from the English Department, they are passionate about what the department and its programs have to offer students and want to help make opportunities more available to students. They want to see demonstrations of how their money is being used.

The current website has a few strengths that should be carried over to the updated version. These include being a professional looking site, that is free from errors and being a platform where donors feel comfortable entering their financial information in order to donate.

Recommendations

- Break up the walls of text with graphics, informational blurbs, or large quotes to draw readers in and make the web pages easier to read and digest.
- Advertise the site in newsletters, social media, and the USU primary website, to get more traffic and drive up site awareness
- Display or make available more information on the scholarships that are directly related to the English Department, either through additional pages or informational blurbs on the giving page or equally accessible page
- Create a page dedicated to sharing the experiences of scholarship recipients and how their award helped them academically
- Update all of the listed degree requirements to reflect their current qualification

Findings, Conclusions, Recommendations

Findings

Over the course of this study, it was apparent that donors made up only a small portion of the users of the English Department website. This was demonstrated through our inability to contact them in order to participate in the study, with an overall total of nine participants. However, their feedback should not go unnoticed. Simple changes, such as creating a page that strictly features social events would not only help donors feel included and up to date with college activities, but the entire user base who might be searching for that information to attend the events and feel included at USU.

Other changes like modernizing the site to be more easily readable and accessible is also a change that would benefit new, frequent, and potential users, with their experience on the site. Instead of being overwhelmed by walls of text, or anxious from spending too much time searching for the navigation bar, users will have more time to appreciate the content on the site and have more meaningful experiences, which could result in return visitations, and increase the possibility of visitors donating to the website.

A consistent finding that appeared in every method of the study was that, overall, the site needs to be updated, and has much to be desired in its current state. Participants in the interview and think-aloud studies were especially vocal about the many changes they would like to see. While not particularly specific on website changes, the survey participants rhetorically give us insights for changes, such as the need to advertise that donors can donate online. Any future changes made to the website to improve the user experience, should benefit all visitors of the site.

It must also be mentioned that every participant in the study visited the site in search for information about some topic related to the English department.

Conclusions

At the core of these findings, we can infer one fact to be consistent: The English Department website has visitors who are donors. These donors are irregular visitors to the site, and visit when they need information, and when they do visit in the search of said information, their search is not always 100% efficient. All donor visitors, both regular and potential, to the English Department website could benefit from a more refined, user focused layout and design.

Creating changes for just the infrequent visitors, will only create more infrequent visitors, which stifles the chances of potential users becoming donors by donating online. However, because infrequent visitors, searching for information, are the majority, these are the changes that should be focused on, in taking steps to creating a better English department website for all users.

Beyond improving the user experience, the next most important step should be creating more substance on the site, to turn infrequent users into frequent visitors. In its current state, the site is serving as an information hub. Some donors would like to see revolving content and in-depth information on social or current events happening on campus grounds. One of our

interview participants wanted to read more information on important USU English historical figures. Should the site have the ability to do so without hindering those searching for important information, substances such as these examples could serve as a method in creating a more frequent user base.

Recommendations

● Motivation

- Improve USU's English Department website and marketing through highlighting the benefits of donating via emails, social media, and other means.
- Include a web page that highlights social activities and/or provides special recognition to multi-generational families of graduates. On these pages, if these activities were funded by donations, make it clear somewhere on the page that it was possible because of donations.
- If there are events that occur because of donations that don't fit into social activities, consider creating a page specifically for donation funded events, scholarship stories, or service opportunities related to the English department (for example, Create a page dedicated to sharing the experiences of scholarship recipients and how their award helped them academically)
- Understand the ebb and flow of economics both locally and nationally to know the best times to ask for donations
- Consider giving some form of incentive to those who donate
- Display the option to donate online more prominently, yet appropriately across the site
- Have a section of the site where users can learn more about their donation options and how donations have helped those categories in the past, using specific stories and images.
- Advertise the site in newsletters, social media, and the USU primary website, to get more traffic and drive up site awareness

● Security

- Ensure that the privacy policy is clearly accessible near the donation portal or pages that discuss online donations
- Ensure that the donation portal, and any user information that is submitted through there, is secure

● Online Experience

- Improve online platforms overall such as updating web standards and information, and create pages that center on an organization's activities, projects, mission, and vision.
- Perform enough user testing with the new site to know that it is both web efficient and attractive to those that visit.
- Make the navigation bar stationary when scrolling down a page

- Break up the sites text heavy appearance with accompanying visuals and graphics, giving particular attention to graphics that highlight department events, or showcase how donations are contributing to the university
- Tailor the web pages with Alumni, businesses, and student use in mind, paying extra heed to make frequently accessed topics most easily found.
- Update all of the listed degree requirements to reflect their current qualification

Appendix

Letters of Information (LOI's)

Interview Letter of Information

Introduction

You are invited to participate in a classroom research study conducted by members of Erica Leigh's Methods and Research in Technical Communication undergraduate class. Erica Leigh is a Postdoctoral Teaching Fellow in the English Department at Utah State University. This project is designed to improve the way that the English Department's website functions, especially regarding those who give donations to USU.

This form includes detailed information on the research to help you decide whether or not you would like to participate in this study. Please read it carefully. Ask any questions you have before you agree to participate.

Procedures

Your participation will involve participating in a semi-structured interview about the English Department website. The interview should take approximately 15 minutes.

Risks

This is a minimal risk research study, meaning that the risks of participating are no more likely or serious than those you encounter in everyday activities. The only foreseeable discomfort in this study would be the sharing of your personal information regarding financial contributions to university with the research team. It should be known, especially for individuals who have donated previously, that the research team will not require exact donation amounts, as the study is strictly for researching whether one would feel more compelled to donate or not in regards to the website. Furthermore, in order to continue to minimize risks and discomforts, the researchers will not share your personal or identifying information with the public or with anyone who is not a member of the research team. If you were interviewed your information is needed to be shared, we will ask for your permission, and you will decide if you wish to remain anonymous. If you have a bad research-related experience, please contact the principal investigator of this study at erica.leigh@usu.edu.

Benefits

Participation in this study may directly benefit you by giving you a better browsing experience when visiting the English Department website, especially if you are a donor or prospective donor. More broadly, this study will help the researchers learn more about optimizing the English Department website for donors and may help the English department and USU as a whole by making it easier for potential donors to learn about and give support to USU.

Confidentiality

The researchers will make every effort to ensure that the information you provide as part of this project remains confidential. Your identity will not be revealed in any presentations or reports resulting from this research study.

We will collect your information by taking notes during the interview. This information will be securely stored in a restricted-access folder on Google Drive, an encrypted, cloud-based storage system. This information will be destroyed at the end of the semester (December 2020).

It is unlikely, but possible, that others (e.g., at Utah State University or state or federal officials) may require us to share the information you give us from the study to ensure that the research was conducted safely and appropriately. We will share your information only if law or policy requires us to do so.

It is possible, although unlikely, that unauthorized individuals could gain access to your responses because the information will be stored securely online. However, your participation involves risks similar to a person's everyday use of the Internet.

Voluntary Participation, Withdrawal

Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. If you agree to participate now and change your mind later, you may withdraw at any time by contacting Amelia or Brandon, who are the contact persons for their student research team, at kimber.amelia@aggiemail.usu.edu and don.evans@aggiemail.usu.edu. If you choose to withdraw after we have already collected information from you, we will permanently delete the interview notes.

Compensation

There is no compensation for participating in this project.

IRB Review

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the protection of human research participants at Utah State University has reviewed and approved this study. If you have questions about the research study itself, please contact the Principal Investigator at erica.leigh@usu.edu. If you have questions about your rights or would simply like to speak with someone other than the research team about questions or concerns, please contact the IRB Director at (435) 797-0567 or irb@usu.edu.

Erica Leigh
Principal Investigator
erica.leigh@usu.edu

Amelia Kimber
Student Investigator
(435)245-2100; kimber.amelia@aggiemail.usu.edu

Informed Consent

By indicating your acceptance, you agree to participate in this study. You indicate that you understand the risks and benefits of participation, and that you know what you will be asked to do. You also agree that you have asked any questions you might have and are clear on how to stop your participation in the study if you choose to do so. Please type your name below to indicate your understanding.

Name: _____

Survey Letter of Information

Introduction

You are invited to participate in a classroom research study conducted by members of Erica Leigh's Methods and Research in Technical Communication undergraduate class. Erica Leigh is a Postdoctoral Teaching Fellow in the English Department at Utah State University. This project is designed to improve the way that the English Department's website functions, especially regarding those who give donations to USU.

This form includes detailed information on the research to help you decide whether or not you would like to participate in this study. Please read it carefully. For the interview and think-aloud protocol, ask any questions you have before you agree to participate. If you have further questions, contact Amelia or Brandon, who are the contact persons for this project. They can be reached at kimber.amelia@aggiemail.usu.edu and don.evans@aggiemail.usu.edu.

Procedures

Your participation will involve taking an online survey about the English Department website and donations. The online survey is planned to have about 15 questions, and is expected to take approximately 6-10 minutes to complete. We anticipate that roughly 10 people will participate in this study.

Risks

This is a minimal risk research study, meaning that the risks of participating are no more likely or serious than those you encounter in everyday activities. The only foreseeable discomfort in this study would be the sharing of your personal information regarding financial contributions to university with the research team. It should be known, especially for individuals who have donated previously, that the research team will not require exact donation amounts, as the study

is strictly for researching whether one would feel more compelled to donate or not in regards to the website. Furthermore, in order to continue to minimize risks and discomforts, the researchers will not share your personal or identifying information with the public or with anyone who is not a member of the research team. Those who take the survey, your information is stored completely anonymously. If you have a bad research-related experience, please contact the principal investigator of this study at erica.leigh@usu.edu.

Benefits

Participation in this study may directly benefit you by giving you a better browsing experience when visiting the English Department website, especially if you are a donor or prospective donor. More broadly, this study will help the researchers learn more about optimizing the English Department website for donors and may help the English department and USU as a whole by making it easier for potential donors to learn about and give support to USU.

Confidentiality

The researchers will make every effort to ensure that the information you provide as part of this project remains confidential. Your identity will not be revealed in any presentations or reports resulting from this research study.

We will collect your information through this survey. This information will be securely stored in a restricted-access folder on Google Drive, an encrypted, cloud-based storage system. This information will be destroyed at the end of the semester (December 2020). It is unlikely, but possible, that others (e.g., at Utah State University or state or federal officials) may require us to share the information you give us from the study to ensure that the research was conducted safely and appropriately. We will share your information only if law or policy requires us to do so. The research team will work to ensure confidentiality to the degree permitted by technology.

Voluntary Participation, Withdrawal

Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. If you choose to withdraw after we have already collected information from you, we would be unable to remove your responses from consideration because participation is completely anonymous, therefore we would not be able to determine which responses were yours.

Compensation

There is no compensation for participating in this project.

IRB Review

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the protection of human research participants at Utah State University has reviewed and approved this study. If you have questions about the research study itself, please contact the Principal Investigator at erica.leigh@usu.edu. If you have questions about your rights or would simply like to speak with someone other than the research

team about questions or concerns, please contact the IRB Director at (435) 797-0567 or irb@usu.edu.

Erica Leigh
Principal Investigator
erica.leigh@usu.edu

Amelia Kimber
Student Investigator
(435)245-2100; kimber.amelia@aggiemail.usu.edu

Informed Consent

By indicating your acceptance, you agree to participate in this study. You indicate that you understand the risks and benefits of participation, and that you know what you will be asked to do. You also agree that you have asked any questions you might have and are clear on how to stop your participation in the study if you choose to do so. Please click "Yes" to indicate your understanding

Think-Aloud Letter of Information

Introduction

You are invited to participate in a classroom research study conducted by members of Erica Leigh's Methods and Research in Technical Communication undergraduate class. Erica Leigh is a Postdoctoral Teaching Fellow in the English Department at Utah State University. This project is designed to improve the way that the English Department's website functions, especially regarding those who give donations to USU.

This form includes detailed information on the research to help you decide whether or not you would like to participate in this study. Please read it carefully. Ask any questions you have before you agree to participate.

Procedures

Your participation will be in a think-aloud protocol about the English Department website and donations. It should take approximately 15 minutes. We anticipate that 2 people will participate in the study.

Risks

This is a minimal risk research study, meaning that the risks of participating are no more likely or serious than those you encounter in everyday activities. The only foreseeable discomfort

in this study would be the sharing of your personal information regarding financial contributions to university with the research team. It should be known, especially for individuals who have donated previously, that the research team will not require exact donation amounts, as the study is strictly for researching whether one would feel more compelled to donate or not in regards to the website. Furthermore, in order to continue to minimize risks and discomforts, the researchers will not share your personal or identifying information with the public or with anyone who is not a member of the research team. If your information is needed to be shared, it will be stripped of your name and you will remain anonymous. If you have a bad research-related experience, please contact the principal investigator of this study at erica.leigh@usu.edu.

Benefits

Participation in this study may directly benefit you by giving you a better browsing experience when visiting the English Department website, especially if you are a donor or prospective donor. More broadly, this study will help the researchers learn more about optimizing the English Department website for donors and may help the English department and USU as a whole by making it easier for potential donors to learn about and give support to USU.

Confidentiality

The researchers will make every effort to ensure that the information you provide as part of this project remains confidential. Your identity will not be revealed in any presentations or reports resulting from this research study.

We will collect your information through the think-aloud by taking notes that will be stored on Google Drive. This information will be securely stored until it is destroyed at the end of the semester (December 2020).

It is unlikely, but possible, that others (e.g., at Utah State University or state or federal officials) may require us to share the information you give us from the study to ensure that the research was conducted safely and appropriately. We will share your information only if law or policy requires us to do so.

The research team will work to ensure confidentiality to the degree permitted by technology. Your participation involves risks similar to that of everyday use of the Internet.

Voluntary Participation, Withdrawal

Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. If you choose to withdraw after we have already collected information from you, we would be unable to remove your responses from consideration because participation is completely anonymous, therefore we would not be able to determine which responses were yours.

Compensation

There is no compensation for participating in this project.

IRB Review

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the protection of human research participants at Utah State University has reviewed and approved this study. If you have questions about the research study itself, please contact the Principal Investigator at erica.leigh@usu.edu. If you have questions about your rights or would simply like to speak with someone other than the research team about questions or concerns, please contact the IRB Director at (435) 797-0567 or irb@usu.edu.

Erica Leigh
Principal Investigator
erica.leigh@usu.edu

Amelia Kimber
Student Investigator
(435)245-2100; kimber.amelia@aggiemail.usu.edu

Informed Consent

By indicating your acceptance, you agree to participate in this study. You indicate that you understand the risks and benefits of participation, and that you know what you will be asked to do. You also agree that you have asked any questions you might have and are clear on how to stop your participation in the study if you choose to do so. Please type your name below to indicate your understanding.

Name: _____

Think-aloud protocol and structured script

Think Aloud Protocol Procedures

All think-aloud sessions will be conducted over a scheduled Zoom meeting. Members in attendance will include: Brandon and Amelia as note takers, Rhianon as the participant liaison, Makenzi as gofer, and the user. Before the session begins, an email will be sent containing a handout detailing the process of the study and the Letter of Information for participants to sign.

After the Letter of Information is signed and returned, participants will be contacted to set up a date for the session. Sessions will take roughly 30 minutes. In the beginning of the session, participants will be asked to clear any open tabs or unnecessary software (excluding Zoom and pdf of resources) on their computer. Participants will also be asked to share their screen for the duration of the think-aloud session. The prompter will keep their camera on the

whole time and all other team members will have audio only. At any time the participant may end the session early if they have concerns or questions. All sessions will follow the outlined script below.

Handout

Participants will also be sent a document containing links and other resources needed during the study. The handout will contain the following:

“Donor of Utah State University,

Thank you so much for agreeing to participate in this study. Currently, the USU English Department is reorganizing their website to better suit the needs of donors like you. This Think-Aloud study will help us optimize the website for you and other users’ experience. Think-Aloud sessions will take place over a Zoom meeting requiring all participants to have access to a computer and the internet. Each participant will engage in one session that will take roughly 30 minutes to complete.

Voluntary participation in the Think Aloud study will have participants actively involved to complete a series of tasks on the USU English Department website while speaking aloud during the process. This includes statements such as: thoughts, opinions, suggestions on improvement, the process of performing the tasks, etc. Participants will be asked to share their screen and keep their mic on during the session. The proceedings, with permission from the participant, may be recorded to better evaluate and apply to the research.

The session will be broken down into three parts. Parts will include a grouping of tasks to be completed. Tasks will include navigation of the English Department website to:

Going to the English Department donation page. This will take approximately 5 minutes.

Begin from <http://english.usu.edu/>

Navigate to the Giving Page (the tab for this being located near the top of the English Department screen).

Review the information contained on the Giving Page. Remember to say aloud what you are thinking.

Click on either of the “Make a Gift” buttons. Pretend as if you are making a donation commenting aloud on the process.

The first task is complete. Return to the Home Page of the English Department website.

Finding the various media and informational pages. This will take approximately 5 minutes.

Begin from <http://english.usu.edu/>

Navigate the site to find the Publications and Media page.

Read through content and remark aloud any thoughts.

Navigate to the About page.

Click the various subheadings and remark aloud any thoughts.

The second task is complete. Return to the Home Page of the English Department website.

Reading through the content under the various headings. This will take approximately 5 minutes.

Begin from <http://english.usu.edu/>

Navigate through the English Department website tabs.

Be sure to remark aloud on the information contained, visually appeal, and anything that you would like to see contained.

The third task is now complete.

We ask that if you are still okay with participating in this study to please read through the Letter of Information attached below. We ask that if you agree to participate in this study please download and sign Letter of Information under the Informed Consent section. Reply to this email with the signed form. Thank you for your time and if you have any questions please contact Amelia (kimber.amelia@aggiemail.usu.edu) or Brandon (don.evans@aggiemail.usu.edu).

Think-aloud Script

“Hello my name is Rhiannon Fritschle, and I’ll be conducting this think aloud meeting today. I’m joined with some of my group members to help with taking down notes about your experience as well as a few other tasks. For our meeting today, I’ll need to read these instructions verbatim so that everyone in the study receives the same information.

We are observing donors interacting with the English Department website, in order to better understand their browsing habits, so that we can further learn how to create a better website experience. Before this meeting you should have received an email from us containing our Letter of Information, or LOI, were you able to read, and sign it? We’re going to need a copy, digitally signed from you before we begin. Only sign if you agree with what’s written.

Before we begin, have you ever visited the English department website before? [if yes] How often do you visit it?

This think-aloud study will be a great resource to us to help us understand the moment to moment thought processes of English Department Website users. All we ask you to do is to speak your thoughts as you browse the website. It may be a bit awkward at first, but we know you’ll get used to it soon. Any thought at all that comes into your mind, speak it out loud. If you forget to speak out loud, we’ll remind you to keep talking.

To warm up with speaking out loud, let’s do a small exercise. Could you add 2045 and 423 together? There’s no wrong answers here, just say what you’re thinking, and how you might go about the problem. Just keep talking for a minute or two and we’ll move onto the main think-aloud task.

Thank you for doing that! We'll move on to the real think-aloud study now. Remember, if at any time you begin feeling too uncomfortable to continue, you are welcome to withdraw from the study. Participation is voluntary.

We ask that you pull up the website and share your screen. To start, we'll let you roam free around the website for 5 minutes. After the time is up, we'll guide you through some specific pages of the site we want to hear your feedback on. We'll conclude the session with some specific prompts about the site.

[after up to 5 minutes or when the participant has gone through a majority of the pages on the website]

If you are ready to continue we'll move on to a few questions. Feel free to answer with any thoughts that come to mind or, if you prefer, you can refrain from answering.

What do you like and dislike about how the pages look?

Did you find the content on the pages readable? Was it interesting? What would make it more interesting?

Is there anything you feel is missing that you would like to see?

Would you feel comfortable donating through this website?

Now we will move onto the next part. Please click on the Giving Page. Take a minute to read through the text. Feel free to speak your thoughts aloud.

[wait while they scroll through the page]

If you are ready I am going to ask you some similar questions to the last task.

Was this page easy to find and navigate?

What do you like and dislike about how the giving page looks?

Did you find the content readable? Was it interesting? What would make it more interesting?

Is there anything you feel is missing that you would like to see?

Would you feel comfortable donating through this website page?

Now we will move onto the last task. Please click on the Publications and Media Page. Take a minute to read through the page. Feel free to speak your thoughts aloud.

[wait while they scroll through the page]

If you are ready I am going to ask you some similar questions to the last task.

Was this page easy to find and navigate?

What do you like and dislike about how the pages look?

Did you find the content and media on the page readable? Was it interesting? What would make it more interesting?

Is there anything you feel is missing that you would like to see?

Thank you so much for your time. Do you have any questions for us before we wrap this up? “

Interview protocol and semi-structured script

Interview Protocols

All interviews will be conducted over a scheduled Zoom meeting. Members in attendance will include: Amelia as the interviewer, Makenzi as gofer, Brandon and Rhianon as note takers, and the respondent. Participants will have the Letter of Information and the handout below sent to them over email as well as read to them before the interview starts. The survey will then be conducted by the interviewer asking questions and the responder providing answers. Sessions will take roughly 15 minutes to complete. These interviews will be semi-structured with pre-planned questions as well as any on the spot questions that the interviewer feels is relevant to the current session.

Handout

Participants that agree to participate in the interview will be sent the following email with the LOI attached:

“Donor of Utah State University,

Thank you for being willing to talk with us. We are undergraduate students who are currently working on a research project for our ENGL 3450 class. We are investigating how USU's English Department can improve its website for donors. They are currently in the process of giving the whole website an overhaul and we are hoping to contribute to their efforts.

We are hoping to find a few donors that are willing to participate in some short interviews. It would be a time commitment of about 15 minutes and would take place via Zoom. We are hoping to schedule people in the afternoon this week on any weekday between 3:30 and 5:00 pm. We will be asking questions regarding the website and may ask participants to browse through the existing website as we speak with them. Is this something that you might be interested in?

Thank you for your time and consideration! We look forward to hearing from you.”

Script (Semi-Structured)

Start by introducing our team members, and thanking them for setting aside some time to do this with us, letting them know how long it's going to take (roughly 15 minutes). Give a brief overview of the project we're doing, the research question we're trying to answer with these interviews, and the impact that their answers will have. Then walk through the highlighted parts of the LOI [attached below] aloud. The LOI will be emailed to them prior to the interview, and it will be recommended that they read it in its entirety, and sign it before joining the meeting.

Questions to be addressed in the interview

Have you ever donated using the English Department website?

(If the donor has used the website) Is this how you usually donate?

Have you encountered any issues with using the website? Do you feel secure using it?

What information were you looking for?

Do you use the website for any other purpose? How often would you say you visit the site?

What would USU need to have on their website for you to want to visit it more regularly?

(If they haven't used the website) Were you previously aware you could donate through the website?

Is there something preventing you from doing so or is it more convenient for you to donate a different way?

What would USU need to have on their website for you to want to visit it?

What motivates you to donate in general?

If you could opt to have you, or your company's name listed as a donor on the website, would that recognition increase or decrease your desire to visit the website?

Would your opinion of USU be more positive or negative of this action, regardless of if you opt to have your name displayed?

Additional Script Protocol

If the participant falls silent

“Do you need more time to think about this question, or could we circle back to it later?”

If we feel a response needs more information (where the additional information is [x])

“That's interesting. Could you specify more about [x]?”

“Could you go into [x] more?”

“We'd like to know more about [x] for our study, could you elaborate on [x]?”

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