Designing RULA With the User Experience in Mind: Strategies, Definitions and Priorities

Diane Granfield, User Experience Librarian, August, 2016

When we talk about the user experience, we are talking about something that can be measured. It is plottable and predictable. The user experience is a measure of your end-user’s interaction with your organization: its brand, its product, and its services. (From http://libux.co/)

Good user experience (UX) design actually has some close connections to librarianship: it relates to information-seeking behavior, information architecture, and discovery and findability of information. (Rebecca Blakiston).

Libraries and universities are artifacts and cultures. (Donna Lanclos, keynote at UX conference 2015).

“We are not about collections (as if we ever were) we are about relationships, people; and what they know and do and produce are part of what the library facilitates.” (Donna Lanclos)

Outline

I. Definitions and a Framework (including job description)
II. Methodologies
III. Priorities and Strategies for RULA
IV. Resources
V. Annotated Bibliography

I. Definitions and a Framework

The terms, user-centred and user experience began to surface in the library literature in the early 1990s mostly in relation to computer systems and interfaces. Since the early 2000s we have seen considerable expansion of our notion of the user experience to encompass a wide range of practices and methods. The publication of Studying Students, an anthropological approach to understanding the student experience at the University of Rochester Library (Foster
& Gibbons, 2007), caused a fundamental shift in thinking about user-centred design and helped us better appreciate the importance of the library as an experience. Their efforts were a “wake up call” where they “… saw over and over again how much we did not know about our students and their academic endeavors. … [W]e saw how often our personal assumptions about the students, which have guided years of decisions, were incorrect.” (Foster & Gibbons, 2007, p.82) Consequently, user research and participatory design projects began to flourish across the academic library community and a key seminar sharing methodologies took place in 2012. In her introductory remarks Foster distilled the differences between many forms of library assessment and user-centred planning methods:

Participatory design is an approach to building spaces, services, and tools where the people who will use those things participate centrally in coming up with concepts and then designing the actual products. While it is easy to engage traditional specialists – such as architects and software engineers – in the design and development of spaces and technologies, it is not so easy nor so obvious how to engage lay people who will use what is built. In the case of academic libraries, the challenge is to create a way for faculty members, university staff, undergraduates, and graduate students to contribute their specialized knowledge to the process. Specialist knowledge in this case refers mainly to information about the work they do – how they do it when it goes well, what they do when they hit a snag, what they would do if only they had precisely the spaces and tools that would best support them. With that kind of information, architects and software developers are in a good position to build effectively and support academic work. (Foster, 2012, p.1-2)

Ryerson University struck a commission in 2005 to look at student engagement and experience. The report was published in 2006 and covers a wide range of recommendations. A core value of the initiative was to bring “... decision-making and accountability closest to those affected by these choices.” (p.3) In addition, it was noted that “one of the strongest messages delivered by students is gratification at being asked their opinion, and the hope that they can continue to help make a difference.” (p. 3) In other words, beyond the results of such methods, user-centred planning is fundamentally good PR and increases the likelihood that various initiatives will succeed. We can take from this moment in Ryerson’s history an explicit move to be student-centred. In spite of the term experience in the commission’s mandate, it did not consider
user experience methods beyond townhalls, focus groups and surveys. It is important to note, therefore, that student engagement is not necessarily student experience.

Academic libraries have reorganized or added departments and positions in the past 5-10 years reflecting a growing understanding of “... the connection between design thinking and UX by showing that a good user experience is the result of a thoughtful, intentional design process.” (Bell, 2014, p.371) Below are a number of job postings or departmental descriptions taken from the past past year for user/usability librarians:

… the User Experience Librarian advocates for an excellent user experience on all platforms across all the Libraries’ digital services and resources for our mobile user community, and coordinates a range of activities to assess the digital behaviours and needs of a broad user community. (From University of Toronto posting, January, 2015) New hire, Lisa Gayhart.

… the UX Librarian will be responsible for the development and implementation of programming, activities and projects designed to improve the overall user experience of the libraries. (From Texas Tech University Associate Librarian User Experience posting, n.d.)

… the User Engagement Librarian will be responsible for coordinating the Libraries’ user experience efforts, for both the online and physical library environments on both campuses. This new position will work to develop relationships with the Libraries’ various user communities, and utilize information gathered from these relationships to identify and prioritize the users’ needs as they pertain to the Libraries. (From Florida International University posting, December, 2013)

As our user experience specialist this librarian makes sure our services and instructional products are both easy and pleasurable to use. (From Designing Better Libraries blog post, 2008)

… the User Experience Librarian leads the exploration into user behaviours, expectations, and needs in evolving academic, technological and information environments, and assesses the impact of user services (technology-based and in-person) on Library users. (from University of Guelph posting, October, 2015)

The User Experience Department (UXD) implements programs and services to support improved library experiences for all users. The UXD comprises the following positions: Learning Services Librarian; Outreach & Community Services Librarian; Web & Mobile Services Librarian; Undergraduate Services Librarian; User Education and Web &
Most of these, with the exception of the University of Toronto, reflect a broader scope for usability and this broader definition includes: usability, space design, service design, user profiling and personas and ethnographic research. (See www.weaveux.org Journal of Library User Experience, “What is UX?” for further elaboration.) The Northwestern University framework is a distributed one and a framework that I’ll come back to later in the section on specific recommendations for RULA.

**What is User Experience (UX)?**

The user experience is how someone feels about an experience with regards to our collections, services and website. *User experience,* as opposed to *usability,* is the broader of the two terms; usability is mostly used in relation to web design. User experience relates to emotional connections and making tasks meaningful and valuable. Usability is more task oriented and it is just one of the many aspects that influence and make up the user experience. For many of our users, the library is fundamentally an online experience and the bias in UX until recently, especially in academic librarianship, has been toward computer based systems and interfaces.

Schmidt and Etches (2014) describe *touchpoints* as those things that make up a design environment and “... the sum total of someone’s experience with a library’s touchpoints forms their overall experience - good, bad, or indifferent.” (p.2)

RULA’s touchpoints might include:

- Website
- All the elements that make up our website: catalogue, databases, live chat, Racer, etc.
- Digital materials: articles, ebooks, documents, etc.
- Furniture
- Shelving
- Lighting
- Library card
- Service desks
- Library staff
- The print collection
According to Schmidt and Etches (2014) there are eight principles of library design (p.4-7):

1) **You are not your user.** We should not be “... designing spaces, services, or interfaces with ourselves in mind. Instead we should be designing those things (and everything else) with our users in mind.

2) **The user is not broken.** “If someone has to be taught how to use something, then it’s the thing that is broken, not the user.” (I would say this is a little over stated - some things may require some instruction?)

3) **A good user experience requires research.** “... by learning about the lives, preferences, hopes, and dreams of library members, and by learning more about how they use your library, you can adjust your existing services and create better ones.”

4) **Building a good user experience requires empathy.** “To create meaningful and engaging services that are easy to use, we need to shed our librarian perspectives and think like members. What's more, we have to value this adopted perspective.”

5) **A good user experience must be easy before it can be interesting.** Form follows function. (What about making users awesome?)

6) **Good user experience design is universal.** The design works well for people with disabilities and people without disabilities. The Centre for Universal Design at North Carolina State University has identified seven principles of UD.

7) **Good user experience design is intentional.** “... everything in your library should be designed with user behaviour in mind; everything in your library should be designed with intent.”

8) **Good user experience design is holistic.** “... good UX design is about so much more than good customer service. Good UX design considers all those touchpoints we mentioned above, not just how your members are treated when they walk into your
Ethnography and the User Experience

Ethnography is a qualitative method that often defies one description because it is used in a variety of disciplinary contexts with different traditions. Two defining characteristics could be said to be observational and participatory. Fetterman (1998) described writing the ethnography as “the art and science of describing a group or culture”, and the ethnographer as both “storyteller and scientist.” Fetterman goes on to say that “the ethnographer writes about the routine, daily lives of people. The more predictable patterns of human thought and behavior are the focus of inquiry.” (p.1)

O’Reilly (2005) who provides one of the more succinct descriptions in what she calls a critical minimum definition of ethnography. Minimally ethnography is:

- Iterative-inductive research (that evolves in design through the study), drawing on
- A family of methods
- Involving direct and sustained contact with human agents
- Within the context of their daily lives (and cultures);
- Watching what happens, listening to what is said, asking questions, and
- Producing a richly written account
- That respects the irreducibility of human experience,
- Acknowledges the role of theory
- As well as the researcher’s own role,
- And that views humans as part object/part subject. (p.3)

As noted earlier, the work of Nancy Fried Foster, was a breakthrough in academic library planning because of her use of ethnographic methods. Influenced by Nancy Fried Foster’s, *Studying Students*, another groundbreaking academic library project took shape in Illinois known as ERIAL (Ethnographic Research in Illinois Academic Libraries). ERIAL used a variety of qualitative and ethnographic methods to closely observe students’ research habits over a two year period. “Unlike quantitative studies, which count the frequency of social phenomena, this study is qualitative, depicting how students search for information, what obstacles they encounter, and how they seek help. The analysis is interpretive, yielding rich descriptions of students’ experiences. Project methods include semi-structured interviews, photo elicitation,
II. Specific Qualitative Methods

ERIAL employed nine different qualitative methods in studying libraries: ethnographic interviews, photo journals, mapping diaries, research journals, web design workshops, space design workshops, cognitive maps, research process interviews, and retrospective research paper interviews.

Examples of studies:

Journey Mapping - assessment of services from a student point of view.

A cognitive mapping study done by Donna Lanclos (UNC) drew maps of research and learning landscape of faculty and students. Findings:

- Libraries: faculty did not use physical library; students used many for different purposes.
- Bedroom: all subjects drew bedrooms as key study spaces
- Overall landscape: most subjects are regularly on the move and using a variety of research environments offering varying degrees of concentration/distraction.
- Impact: faculty need more assistance with productive working methods, e.g., mobile tech, cloud computing, time management tools: offer more one on one support. In terms of students stop selling ourselves as a one-stop shop. Offer our services remotely and seamlessly. [www.donnalanclos.com](http://www.donnalanclos.com)

Methodology: Love and Break-up Letters

Love Letter/Break-up Letter to the Library (sample and study from University of Kent)

III. Priorities and Strategies for RULA

- Develop a semi-distributed model of continuous user experience testing with the assistance of the User Experience Librarian and oversight and involvement of the Evaluation and Assessment Committee.
Suggested scope of portfolio: the UX librarian implements programs and services to support improved library experiences for all users. The librarian provides direction regarding priorities and best practices for individual projects that may be undertaken by committees, departments or individual librarians. Priorities and best practices will be developed in consultation with the Evaluation and Assessment Committee.

**Suggested projects for RULA User Experience** (restructure this section as a series of examples of what projects might look like in specific areas/ portfolios/ departments and how the User Experience Librarian could lead and partner):

1. **Space revitalization in the Library; study preferences: group, quiet, graduate carrels; blended and hybrid. - some iteration of this as a concrete project and priority.**
2. Moving through Space study: mapping the use of different spaces within the Library. For example the main floor. [Next-Gen Learning Spaces](https://arlrspeckit.org/) (ARL SPEC Kit 342)
3. Research Community and the Library - focus groups conducted collaboratively with the OVPRI. See the section on Ohio State University in transcript for webinar on [Fostering Research Community Through Library Spaces and Services](https://example.com).
4. Continue to conduct [web usability testing](https://example.com) throughout the year. Work with the Web Committee to develop priorities.
5. Connect Library Instruction to web usability, see [LITA UX interest group](https://example.com).
6. Cognitive Mapping - exploring research spaces and needs of undergrads, grads and faculty.
- Cognitive mapping of learning landscapes - Donna Lanclos; Cognitive mapping of research landscapes

7. Help-seeking behaviours among faculty and students. See College Libraries and Student Culture: What we Know.

8. Seeing through the eyes of students. This study used students from a sociology research methods course. I think there is potential to do a similar collaboration. Discuss further with Kevin Manuel.

9. Have students tour us around - “Show Me Around” - define “their world”

10. Inclusive design initiatives, of either spaces or services, involving participation of diverse, underrepresented communities

11. Creating and maintaining inclusive climates through staffing, collections, and programming

12. Strategies for articulating value and impact of library services on students

13. First Generation College Students - How Can the Library Help?

14. Develop a User Experience Libguide, see, for example, Harvard Law School Libguide

The User Experience and the Strategic Plan

1. Improve the Library’s facilities to create healthy, configurable and flexible learning spaces.
   ● Lib Invigorate as a student-centred revitalization project: Utilize the RULA SAC 2016-2017 cohort.
   ● Redevelop Research Help area: while a number of plans regarding the physical space have either been completed or are taking place, the LLS department could focus on student research needs and processes using ethnographic methods.
   ● Signage
   ● Liaison System
   ● ILS review
   ● User Experience Librarian take: Ryerson Course in Ethnographic Practices

Student experience - some of it is reflected in our policies
   ● Audit policies
   ● First year students
Aboriginal Students

IV. Resources

Websites/blogs/online docs, etc.


UX in Libraries Conference http://www.uxlib.org

UK Anthrolib blog: http://ukanthrolib.wordpress.com

The Anthropologist in the Stacks: http://atkinsanthro.blogspot.co.uk

The ERIAL project: http://www.erialproject.org/


Community is the new Content: http://orweblog.oclc.org/Community-is-the-new-content/

Blog: https://steadfastlibrarian.wordpress.com/

Underrepresented Populations (Native Americans, in this case): http://scottwhyoung.com/user-experience/underrepresented-populations/

North Carolina State University Libraries Usability Studies http://www.lib.ncsu.edu/userstudies

The Wired Library - User Experience

The Lasting Value of Libraries (Babel Fish, Barbara Fister)

Harvard Law School User Experience Resources

Trends and Innovations in Research Dissemination
Usability Best Practices libguide (UofIllinois, Urbana … )

What is a user experience librarian anyway?

Designing Better Libraries

Inclusive Design Research Centre (OCADU)

Library Terms that Users Understand

10 Best Practices for Doing Usability Testing

It’s important to experiment with methodologies – there’s no bad learning!
  ● From Ethnography in Libraries: Definitely a Thing
    https://discovery.ebsco.com/pulse/article/ethnography-in-libraries-definitely-a-thing
  ● Blogs and posts: Deirdre Costello

Environmental Scan for Positions at academic libraries focusing on UX

University of Guelph User Experience Posting

University of Toronto User Experience Librarian

University of Toronto UX posting

York University Libraries employed a consultant to revamp their website

Queen’s University has a position, Senior Web Development and User Experience Technician, (Discovery and Technology Services)

McMaster University employed consultants to overhaul their website, The McMaster University Library Website: User Study & Recommendations for Development

Western University Libraries Usability Testing blog post

Mita Williams is User Experience Librarian at University of Windsor
Wilfrid Laurier University Web and User Experience Librarian Posting

University of Waterloo Library Associate, E-learning and User Experience Assessment posting

Carleton University - nothing came up via google and their website has no discernable staff directory.

April 13, 2016 also checked UBC, UofA, UofC, SFU - could not find UX related positions or initiatives (though highly unlikely there was none of the latter).

University of Wisconsin-La Crosse, Web and User Experience Librarian posting

[Series] So You Want to Be a User Experience Librarian?

User Experience at the University of Virginia Library

User Experience Team Proposal, University Library at University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Articles:


- Service blueprinting in its simplest form “... entails visually mapping out the service experience through the customer's point of view.”


**Books in RULA:**

College libraries and student culture : what we now know / edited by Lynda M. Duke and Andrew D. Asher. (on order)
Usability testing: a practical guide for librarians / Rebecca Blakiston. (on order)

Badass: making users awesome / Kathy Sierra.

Usable, Usable, Desirable: Applying User Experience Design to Your Library by Aaron Schmidt and Amanda Etches (ordered April 26/16)


Don't make me think! : a common sense approach to Web usability / Steve Krug

The design of everyday things / Donald A. Norman

Designing the obvious : a common sense approach to Web and mobile application design /Robert Hoekman, Jr.

The UX book : process and guidelines for ensuring a quality user experience / Rex Hartson, Pardha S. Pyla

Badass : making users awesome / Kathy Sierra

Planning and implementing resource discovery tools in academic libraries / [edited by] Mary Pagliero Popp & Diane Dallis

Usability testing : a practical guide for librarians / Rebecca Blakiston

Useful, usable, desirable : applying user experience design to your library / Aaron Schmidt and Amanda Etches

Information Literacy
Information Now: A Graphic Guide to Student Research

Metaliteracy in Practice (RULA on order)
*Writing culture: the poetics and politics of ethnography* GN307.7 W75 - see chapters by James Clifford and/or George Marcus - one of these chapters is about the use of poems and plays (writing of?) in ethnographic research.

**CONSIDERING EDI**

- [Ithaka S+R Diversity Equity and Inclusion in Academic Libraries](http://crl.acrl.org/content/75/4/492.full.pdf)

While talking about EDI in academic libraries, a few of us landed on these links:

Mary Kandiuk's article: [http://crl.acrl.org/content/75/4/492.full.pdf](http://crl.acrl.org/content/75/4/492.full.pdf)

also this survey

ARL Diversity Recruitment:
[http://www.arl.org/leadership-recruitment/diversity-recruitment#.VzzZU6aR8ZQ](http://www.arl.org/leadership-recruitment/diversity-recruitment#.VzzZU6aR8ZQ)

Many libraries have Diversity Hiring Committees in the US, and just to name a few:

University of Oregon: [https://library.uoregon.edu/diversity](https://library.uoregon.edu/diversity)

University of California, Berkeley - [http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/LAUC/diversity/index.html](http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/LAUC/diversity/index.html)

University of Michigan:

Penn State: [https://www.libraries.psu.edu/psul/diversity/committee.html](https://www.libraries.psu.edu/psul/diversity/committee.html)