The Heart of the University: Library Link Location on Doctoral Granting Institutions Webpages and Correlation with Research Output

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ABSTRACT

While other research articles have looked at visibility of the library and reasons for where the link to the library webpage is placed, this article will explore how the location of the library link on doctorate-granting institution websites correlates with research output. In this article, the author used the Carnegie Classification framework for doctorate-granting universities and classified the library link location on their university websites to show that there was a correlation between placement of the library link and the research output of the university. The results show that doctoral granting institutions with higher research output put the link to their library on more prominent positions on the university website.

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INTRODUCTION

Historically, the libraries at universities have been a central hub of learning. Having a library in a central and visible location on campus was seen as an important aspect of scholarship and essential to the educational mission of the campus. Having an accessible and visually appealing building for finding information was essential to the success of the university and equally relevant to all the areas of study and therefore was placed as conspicuously as possible. Albert Einstein has frequently been quoted as saying, "The only thing that you absolutely have to know is the location of the library." Charles Eliot, President of Harvard University from 1834 to 1926, said, "The Library is the heart of the University."[1] Academically-minded individuals have historically known the value of a centrally-located library, but as the digital age blurs the concept of physical location within universities, the question arises whether these sayings carry any merit in the modern era.

As we enter this new era we find that there is ready access to information on the internet and also more information and access provided digitally on university webpages. Where does the library fit into this equation? Is the location of the library link synonymous with historical campus buildings or has the digital landscape changed these priorities?

In order to examine whether the digital location of the library is analogous to its historical physical one, we need to establish a relationship between the research standing of an institution and the placement of the link that is used to access the library page from the university website. One can infer the importance of the library to the university

if there is a higher prominence of the link to the university library (or libraries) that correlates with the institution's higher research standing.

The literature has addressed the general trend in "visibility" of the library link by discussing various scholastic trends related to the link but has not attempted to establish a correlation based specifically upon research ranking. Visibility and prominence of the library link are important issues. If trends or associations can be found to have a consistent pattern, the reasons for the library placement can be meted out and conclusions can be drawn about the research prestige of the universities based on the placement of their library link.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature reviewed on the topic was based on the following criteria: research that was performed on higher education institutions or within higher education institutions, research evaluating institutions homepages for library links based on link location, and link format or link organization. Also research may include case studies, qualitative studies or quantitative studies. Studies are listed in chronological order.

Stover and Zink (1996) used a point-based system to rank higher education institution library homepages and addressed whether links to the library were to be found on parent institutions' home pages. Forty institutions were studied, including 37 universities and three colleges in the United States and Canada. These schools were selected based on the top relevancy ranking of the Yahoo! Search Engine at that time based on the search query "Reference:Libraries:University Libraries". The study found that 34 of the 40 homepages for parent institutions featured a link to the library website.

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[1] From the quote cum adage, "The Library is the Heart of the University," attributed to Charles William Eliot, President of Harvard University.

In 1998, King examined the 120 Association of Research Libraries members to compare the number of steps from the parent institution website to the library home page (King, 1998). The author found that 44% of library home pages were found in one step, 37.5% were found in two steps, 10% were in three steps, and one institution had the link placed in four steps. Nine libraries had no parent institution and were excluded from the evaluation.

Thirteen member libraries of the Committee on Institutional Cooperation (CIC) were evaluated for the findability of their library-related links. Five of the CIC institutions had a link directly to the library on the institution home page. The remaining institutions placed the library link in various locations including under "research" or "faculty and staff" (Dewey, 1999).

Thirteen historically black colleges and universities (HBCU) were studied for various metrics, including the accessibility of the library from the parent institutions home page. Additionally 52 non-HBCU sites were evaluated for comparison purposes. Eleven HBCU institutions or 85% of the institutions made the library home page accessible. Of the fifty-two non-HBCU institutions studied, all of them provided access to the library from the institution home page. The author goes on to further state that fifteen of the library home pages could only be found after browsing the parent institution's website, leading the reader to assume a possible conflation of the terms "home page" and "web site" (Agingu, 2000).

Bao (2000) was the first instance of a deep examination of the categories under which the link to the library is classified, in addition to the page level of the university website on which library link resides. Additionally, he was the first author to address a specific reason that was correlated with how the institutions were assigning the location of the library link, in this case the elevation of the highest degree level offered at each of the various institutions studied. In this research he used Carnegie Categories for comparison, including Doctorate-Granting Public institutions (DPU), Doctorate-Granting Private institutions (DPR), Master's Universities Public (MPU), Master's Universities Private (MPR), Baccalaureate Colleges Public (BPU), and Baccalaureate Colleges Private (BPR). Of the 1402 such institutions, an equal proportion of each of the total number of institutions was observed in the study for a total sample size of 143 institutions. The link level was observed, and a predefined category was assigned to each of the various institutions. Boa identified that the higher degree level the institution offered the more likely the library link would appear at higher page levels, and he also observed that the institutions that only offered lower level degrees were more likely to omit the library link entirely.

Astroff (2001) created organizational schemes for university websites. Three categories were determined: listing units by function, by the function performed by each unit, or by the role that the site user plays in the university community. Astroff discussed how previous research on library link accessibility is impacted by the design and organization of the university web page. Case examples are cited to elaborate upon the conclusions for these categories.

A study of 106 ARL and non-ARL member institutions evaluated links for direct links (Welch, 2005). Eighty percent of the institutions were found to have direct links. Welch defined direct links on the university homepage as links that are visible without "mouse-overs". While the article mentions the institutional placement of the library link, it mostly focuses on marketing and public relations aspects of the library website.

Harpel-Burke (2006) studied the organization of university home pages by user groups by focusing on four-year, medium-sized institutions. The author examined link placement and the terminology used to refer to library or libraries on the university web site. The link's appearance on the website, the directness of the link, scrolling requirements, menus, and additional metrics were evaluated with regards to the library link. Ninety-one percent of the institutions were observed to have links to the library on their website.

One hundred fifty medical schools belonging to the American Association of Medical Colleges (AAMC) were examined for library links appearing on the school home page. Sixty-one percent of member schools did not provide a link on the home page with 76 institutions having the link visible and 16 containing it on a drop down menu. Three schools provided no access pathway to the library on their website. This was possibly due to the decision that internal user groups would not want to access the library through the school's home page (Thomas, 2011).

A dataset from the National Center for Education Statistics Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System and two-year and four-year institutions offering a minimum of an associate's degree were classified by size based on the Carnegie Foundation size classification model (Becher, 2015). A set of 357 institutions were randomly selected. A four-point scale of visibility was developed using a cognitive cost model. Whether the institution had a student portal or whether the library had a webmaster were also recorded. Interviews were taken from targeted selected institutions. Institutions were compared based on library visibility based on financial status, degree level offered, and institutions size. Becher found considerable variability in the results. According to the author, one of the main issues that changes the way the websites are being used is that student portals are becoming more commonly used. Since internal traffic is directed through the portal, the public interface changes to accommodate mostly external users who may not be looking for the library link. A regression analysis showed that financial status of the institution was very influential on where the link was placed with those with a for-profit model and higher marketing needs having less visibility. The author concluded that the perception of the institution of the function of the website, either as a marketing tool or an access point, influences the visibility of the library on the institution's homepage.

METHODS

A list of each framework within the doctorate granting institutions classified by the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education was obtained for the purposes of this study (n = 256) based on their ranking for 2014. University websites were investigated using the institution home page as the starting point (RU/VH: Research Universities (very high research activity), 2014). Observations of institutions' websites were taken and data was collected between August 2014 and October 2014.
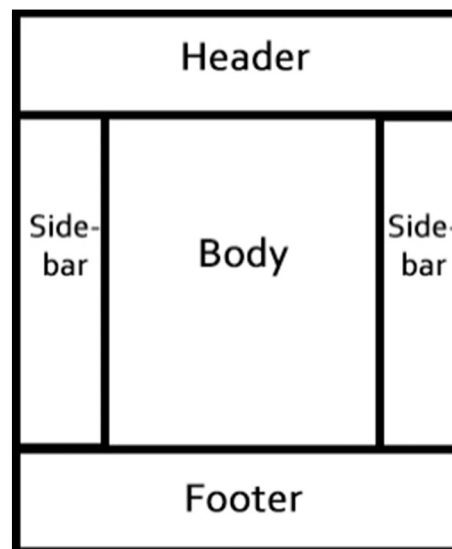

Fig. 1. Webpage region.