Beyond Discovery Tools: The Evolution of Discovery at ECU Libraries

Virginia Bacon
East Carolina University, baconv@ecu.edu

Ginny Boyer
East Carolina University, boyerg@ecu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/atg

Part of the Library and Information Science Commons

Recommended Citation
DOI: https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.6563

This document has been made available through Purdue e-Pubs, a service of the Purdue University Libraries. Please contact epubs@purdue.edu for additional information.
Beyond Discovery Tools: The Evolution of Discovery at ECU Libraries

by Virginia Bacon (Electronic Resources Access & Discovery Librarian, Joyner Library, East Carolina University) <bacovm@ecu.edu>

and Ginny Boyer (Head, Application & Discovery Services, Joyner Library, East Carolina University) <boyerg@ecu.edu>

Introduction

At East Carolina University (ECU) Libraries, the term “discovery” has been in a state of evolution over the past few years. “Discovery” initially became an important part of librarians’ vocabulary with the introduction of a new kind of library system called the “discovery layer,” “service,” or “tool.” Examples of this include commercially available products such as Serials Solutions’ Summon, EBSCO’s EDS, OCLC’s WorldCat Local, and Ex Libris’ Primo. Since their introduction several years ago, many academic libraries have adopted these tools to help users uncover more of their collections in a Google-like search environment. Thomsett-Scott and Reese provide a comprehensive review of how the tools have been written about extensively, the idea of discovery has evolved beyond just the tools. At East Carolina University (ECU) Libraries, the term “discovery” encompasses a broader set of considerations, including overall usability of the libraries’ search tools; how design of user experience facilitates resource discovery; integration of the libraries’ Websites as an essential piece of the discovery framework; and overall access and retrieval concerns that impact the libraries’ ability to provide an optimal information seeking experience for library users.

This article discusses the efforts undertaken at ECU Libraries that reflect this broadened understanding of “discovery.”

ECU is served by three physically distinct libraries led by two separate administrators. Together, the main J.Y. Joyner Library and the smaller Music Library are called Academic Library Services (ALS), and report to one dean. Laupus, the health sciences library (HSL), has its own director. ALS and HSL are further separated by being located on two different campuses; ALS is on the main campus of ECU, while HSL is located a few miles away on the health sciences campus. ALS and HSL share an ILS and an ERMS but historically have maintained separate Websites and online catalogs. The issue of shared discovery interfaces manifested itself initially in a Discovery Committee charged with providing leadership and vision for the libraries’ suite of search tools. To ensure equitable representation for all, membership of the committee consisted of staff from all three libraries and the group adopted co-chair model with a representative chair from both ALS and HSL. Although the acquisition of Serials Solutions’ Summon prompted the creation of this committee, its purview soon expanded to include the SirsiDynix Sympho-
Creating and Promoting the “ECU Libraries” Brand

An essential part of creating an improved shared discovery experience for the ECU Libraries was to establish a single name and identity for the two libraries. Creating a shared brand was desirable for practical reasons because the interfaces that had previously been labeled as “Laupus” or “Joyner” now needed a label that was inclusive of both. This helped create a seamless navigation experience for users as they moved among various interfaces. The committee also felt that it would send the important message to library users that both libraries are part of ECU despite being on two different campuses. The branding reinforces the shared mission to serve all ECU users, regardless of campus affiliation. Because the libraries are administratively separate, there was no formally established term that encompassed them both. However, the two libraries had collaborated on various efforts in the past, primarily involving e-resource acquisition, and the phrase “ECU Libraries” was already used to refer to other shared initiatives. The Discovery Committee felt that since it had already been used historically, “ECU Libraries” was a logical choice for branding the new shared discovery interfaces. Adding to the practicality of this choice was an “ECU Libraries” wordmark that had been created by a designer at HSL. This wordmark only needed to be tweaked slightly before being deployed across shared interfaces (see Figure 1).

Figure 1.

The “ECU Libraries” wordmark and phrase were used to brand all of the new, shared discovery interfaces, including the OPAC, Summon, and WorldCat Local. Other newly shared parts of the libraries’ Websites, such as ILL and LibGuides, were also branded as ECU Libraries. The phrase is also starting to appear on some printed materials promoting these tools. Another important category of interfaces to receive this branding is e-resources. The libraries now have uniform branding across platforms that offer customization options for subscribing libraries. Because ECU Libraries have access to dozens of interfaces, it was a significant project to brand all of them. Major platforms such as EBSCOhost, Proquest, and ScienceDirect were branded right away, but it would have been time consuming to individually brand each of the dozens of platforms that offered customization. Instead, the branding of those smaller platforms was integrated into the annual e-resource use statistics gathering process.

Promotion of ECU Libraries branding is ongoing as new e-resources are acquired and other e-resource platforms allow this customization. Furthermore, all future shared discovery interfaces will continue to receive the ECU Libraries branding. These branding efforts will reinforce the collaborative nature of the libraries’ work; emphasize to library users that both libraries exist to serve the entire ECU community; and provide a seamless, unified identity for discovery interfaces. In addition to branding tools and resources with this collaborative label, new positions created at either library have the ECU Libraries moniker included in their job descriptions. Not surprisingly, many of these positions (such as the Discovery Services Librarian and the Electronic Resource, Access & Discovery Librarian) operate in the discovery arena. The addition of this label emphasizes to new hires — as well as to everyone in the libraries — that it is their responsibility to further and promote the ECU Libraries for the benefit of all.

Improving Usability and Design of Discovery Interfaces

Apart from creating a shared discovery experience and brand for the ECU Libraries, it was also imperative that the usability and design of discovery interfaces be improved. As mentioned above, many interfaces were poorly designed or outdated, and there were often a confusing number of access points for any given resource. For each interface that was updated, the design principles of simplicity and consistency were applied. In addition, the committee consulted various stakeholders from different departments every step of the way in order to get as many perspectives as possible on the diverse needs of library users. Many user interfaces had been designed with the wrong audience — librarians — in mind. For the updated interfaces, it was essential that a new focus was placed on designing for the correct audience: the library user.

“One Search” is the name that ECU Libraries decided to give to their shared instance of Summon in order to emphasize the one stop, Google-like search experience. The previous widget (see Figure 2) on the ALS Website used a tabbed structure that defaulted to a One Search box but made users select a different tab to see other search options. This design confused the search box with links both above and below. Often users would not venture beyond the initial, prominent tab and would not encounter the other tools and resources available to them. Additionally, to the right of the search box was a large, colorful “One Search” icon. This icon appeared to be the button to click to initiate a search, but the actual button was located in the rightmost portion of the search box. This previous design resulted in a confusing array of navigation and search options that cluttered the ALS homepage. To add to the confusion, each of the libraries offered a different search widget on their respective homepages. The redesign and implementation of the One Search widget across multiple library Web presences is a great example of how these principles were applied. The One Search widget is the primary search and discovery area on the libraries’ home pages. On these pages the One Search box is featured prominently and is accompanied by links to other shared library resources and collections. For the redesigned widget, the tabbed structure was abandoned. This change helped to simplify the interface and emphasized One Search as the primary gateway to the libraries’ collections. Links to the Database List and OPAC were initially offered on separate tabs, but in the new design were integrated below the One Search box so that all non-Summon interfaces were linked to in a consistent manner. In addition, links were offered to WorldCat Local, Course Reserves, LibGuides, and the E-Journal/E-Book Portal just below the primary One Search box. The tab for Digital Collections was duplicated by...
Beyond Discovery Tools
from page 30

a link elsewhere on the homepage, so it was
eliminated completely. The One Search icon
was moved to the left of the search box, and
the search button was resized and clearly la-
beled with the word “Search.” Finally, labels
for links to tools and resources were adjusted
to avoid library-specific jargon and to better
convey to library users where each link would
take them. For example, the link labeled
“E-journal/E-book Portal” was changed to
read “Find E-journal/E-book titles.” The
result of these changes is a cleaner design
with clear navigation and search options
(see Figure 3). This redesigned widget was
deployed across all of the libraries’ Websites
and on the ECU Libraries landing page. By
applying the same basic principles of good
design to other redesigned interfaces, the
discovery experience of library users has been
greatly improved.

Conclusion

The ECU Libraries have achieved many
successes in their multiple collaborations as
they work towards an optimal user experience,
but much work remains to be done. Many
projects are in the early stages of planning or
already underway, so the discovery landscape
of the ECU Libraries will continue to evolve.
The libraries collectively acknowledge the
need to conduct a formal usability study to
gauge the true successes of their initiatives
and identify further areas of improvement
that are data- rather than perception-driven.
Additional concerns have surfaced that need
to be addressed as we move further down the
path of consolidating tools, resources, and
operations. Primary among these is how far
toward a combined Web presence we can go
while the libraries continue to operate under
two separate administrations. A Spring 2013
program review initiated by the University may
help to inform on future directions related to
this issue. There is also a concern that we may
count with three “ECU Library” rather
than working toward a true combined online
presence. While these concerns do muddy
the waters, it is clear that the ECU Libraries
have fostered their growth beyond labels of
particular tools to encompass what could best
be described as an institutional ethos of sup-
port for the user experience. With this focus
at the forefront, the discovery framework of
the libraries will only continue to improve in
support of the goals and mission of the libraries
and the University at large. 

Endnotes


Rumors
from page 16

Street Press’ Underground and Independent
Comics, Comix, and Graphic Novels. Is your
library purchasing graphic novels? I think I put
that as an I Wonder Wednesday question on
the Website. Have to check. If not, will use it
this week. www.against-the-grain.com/

Speaking of Dennis, he is going to be in
Charleston with his lovely wife Cathy who is
recovering from a lengthy sickness! We need
to welcome them both!

And, PS, Jerry Spiller should also be around
at the Conference. He is a librarian and teaches
at the Art Institute in downtown Charleston!

Dennis and I were commiserating about the
death of Elmore Leonard, one of our favorite
popular writers. Mr. Leonard has 10 rules for
good writing of fiction and one of them is not to
use exclamation points but two or three times in
every 100,000 words. Guess it’s a good thing
that I am not writing fiction!

And we have another new columnist,
Allison Day! Hopefully her first column will
be in the November Charleston Conference
issue. Allison, special collections librarian at
Western Kentucky, came to us via the fab
Jack Montgomery. She will be writing about
hidden special collections in libraries. I am
looking forward to learning more!

continued on page 63