Campus Portal Usability Study

Background
The purpose of this usability study was to discover some initial strengths and weaknesses of the campus portal. The study began in fall of 2007, interviewing 12 people and will continue in 2008 based on the development teams reactions and reception of the recommendations. This is just a jumping off point for the usability of the portal.

Research Questions
- Have the students been using the student portal? What are they finding useful about it?
- How did they find the portal? How do they refer to it?
- Are they able to find common features and use them properly?
- What sort of customizations are they interested in? What are they waiting for?
- Is the terminology easy for them to understand? Is it the same words they would use?
- Are the students currently using any other types of portals? What do they like about them?
- Investigate the students interest in this page, is this something they could use more to be more connected to the school?

Methods
Using about 12 randomly selected volunteers to test the student portal. They will be on the computer to test their reaction to the portal and their ability to use it. A series of questions before and after the computer portion will gage their interest in the portal and gather data as to what they are using now and would like to see in the future. Because this is a limited sample size this will be viewed as qualitative data. The participants will be rewarded with a $2 gift certificate for their time. the testing will take place on the go with a laptop set up.

Key Observations

- Most participants were unfamiliar with the portal and only a few had visited multiple times.
- Of those who had visited the website only once, they were unsure of the advantages of the website over the current system.
- Of those who had visited the website multiple times, they were aware that the website wasn't complete but they were pleased with layout and functionality so far.
- At the end of the study the participants usually stated that the portal was a "place for all important links for students at the university"
- Most of the tasks were easy for participants to complete using the portal. For some tasks however it was a challenge to convince the participant to use portal instead of their normal routine.

- It will be key in the future to balance the functionality being added, against the amount of clutter and link lists on the website.
  - Many participants noted that there was missing functionality, but were already starting to show signs of confusion over the lists of links to be navigated through for the functionality available.

Expanded Observations and Recommendations

User Behaviors
- Many of the participants had limited experience with personalized homepages and RSS feeds. However those who knew of them, knew them very well.
- Most participants were unfamiliar with the portal and only a few had visited multiple times.
- Of those who had visited the website only once, they were unsure of the advantages of the website over the current system.
- Of those who had visited the website multiple times, they were aware that the website wasn't complete but they were pleased with layout and some functionality so far.
    - There is a problem with having only bits and pieces of the website put up at a time, those who use it will get frustrated and confused that key functionality is missing. The main functionality that was commented on was the ability to view account status and to register for classes.
- Participants who were completely new to the portal were able to understand quickly what the goal of the site was. They spent some time looking around on the site and were able to clearly state what they thought it was.
    - At the end of the study the participants usually stated that the portal was a "place for all important links for students at the university"
- Many participants homepages were set to Google or the browser default.
    - Recommendation: Consider creating a Google Gadget that could be used to push more students to portal daily. Could be populated with important upcoming dates or news articles with outward links to portal
- Initial reactions to the portal ranged from "too busy" to "too dull". But most were pleasantly surprised with their experience.
    - The "too dull" comment was in reference to the lack of color and the ominous amount of text that was presented.
    - The "too busy" comment was in reference to too much text pull the user in too many directions at the same time.
    - Overall the users noted that the portal was an improvement of the SIS layout. Even though many were used to the navigation style of SIS.

Task Observations

Transcript and Degree Audit
- Many users were able to quickly and effectively check their transcript and marks from the tool bar item or by clicking on academics -> grades and selecting specific semesters.
- The additional transcript functions were not looked into and should be further examined.
- When looking for their Degree Audit, some participants were looking for the familiar term "View progress towards your degree" from SIS. Based on their relative familiarity with the system this is not uncommon. I would not recommend changing the name as many once they found it would click on degree audit and understood it's meaning.
    - When asked what they were looking for many who were confused said "Check progress" even though this is not what it is called on SIS.

Checking Library Fees
- Many participants noticed the library fees without being directed to look for them. A few participants discovered fees they didn't know about.

- Many did not click the breakdown and couldn't find the title of the book that they owed money on.
  - Recommendation: Adding a link to the financial break down from the academic nested tab would be helpful because many were finding the information on that page.
  - Feature Request: Online renewal of books would be useful for many.
  - Feature Request: Search for Books, including search for books available on RACER.

Fillable Forms
- Many participants missed the placement of these forms and often needed to be coached to find them.
- Most participants didn't know that these forms even existed on portal and were initially clicking on the registrar to find the forms there.
- All participants who found these forms loved them and understood them right away.
- The title "Fillable Form" wasn't harmful to user's understanding but it also didn't contribute anything to the way the interacted with the system.
  - Recommendation: When the add drop form was opened it often said the current semester even though it was well past the last drop date. Ensure that the populated dates on the form make sense to the current time of year.
  - Recommendation: Consider moving around the 4 link menus in the academic tab so that the fillable forms are closer to the academic tools. (Previous recommendation of the heuristic report)

Meal Plan information
- Most participants knew that the meal plan information would be under the financial matters tab.
- Many of the participants did not have meal plans or a new UWin card so were confused by this line of questioning.
  - Recommendation: Talk to some first year students about their meal plan usage and how it works with portal. (see further testing)

Checking Registration Time
- Most participants found this quickly and easily. One participant was confused but the abbreviation "app" as it can be applied to many things.
  - Feature Request: Some commented that an additional tab for this was unnecessary clutter, that the registration time could be a floating reminder on the academic page.

Search for Courses
- A few participants initially commented that this wasn't possible on portal based on their experience with it.
- After careful reading they most were able to find course search in the academic tools.
  - Recommendation: Be very weary of making the academic tools list longer than it already is.
- Most participants were able to search for a course easily as they had always done.
- Many participants were impressed with the new layout of the individual course results, and loved that the prerequisite information was clearly listed.
- Some participants were frustrated when they accidentally used the browser back button in hopes of revising their search.
  - Recommendation: A clearer back button in the portal window of course search may be helpful.

Single Sign On
- None of the participants were confused about the single sign on feature and precieved it as expected behavior.
- Outside of the usability study it has been observed that external links on portal all open in the same new tab or window. This is particularly frustrating when using single sign on to its potential.
    - Recommendation: Ensure that Clew, Webmail and SIS each open into a new tab that will not be disturbed with additional external links on portal.

Additional Comments and Feature Requests
- Many were interested to see how personalized the page was to them.
- Most did not understand what "new at the Leddy" was or meant to them.
    - Recommendation: Change the title of the section to include the degree title of the person.
- Feature Request: Many asked if there could be a link to departmental societies and student organizations.
- Some found the weather distracting because it flashed too often.
- Many participants commented that the banner seemed out of place with the rest of the page. Some expressed strong opinions about the layout and content of the banner.
- Feature Request: Have the parking pass application form online, as a fillable form.
- Feature Request: A few commented that it would be nice to have their professors emails available to them without having to go look it up in the campus directory.
    - Recommendation: On the Courses tab, under instructors, add a link that would perform the directory look up for the user.
- Feature Request: Some asked for a notifications portal that would let the user know when tests, registration dates, events were coming up. The alerts could be dismissed if the user wanted or possibly could add their own.
- Feature Request: When looking at the users exams for a given semester it would be helpful to sort by date.
- When logged into the portal, there is no "Welcome first name!" to indicate that the user is indeed logged into their own account. This tends to create problems when the session log out is long and user could be on a shared computer.

Note: The Feature Requests are suggestions from the participants, they are not necessarily possible but ideas to consider and implement in the future.

Recommendations
1. Recommendation: Consider creating a Google Gadget that could be used to push more students to portal daily. Could be populated with important upcoming dates or news articles with outward links to portal
2. Recommendation: Adding a link to the financial break down from the academic nested tab would be helpful because many were finding the information on that page.
3. Recommendation: When the add drop form was opened it often said the current semester even though it was well past the last drop date. Ensure that the populated dates on the form make sense to the current time of year.
4. Recommendation: Consider moving around the 4 link menus in the academic tab so that the fillable forms are closer to the academic tools. (Previous recommendation of the heuristic report)

5. Recommendation: Talk to some first year students about their meal plan usage and how it works with portal. (see further testing)
6. Recommendation: Be very weary of making the academic tools list longer than it already is.
7. Recommendation: A clearer back button in the portal window of course search may be helpful.
8. Recommendation: Ensure that Clew, Webmail and SIS each open into a new tab that will not be disturbed with additional external links on portal.
9. Recommendation: Change the title of the "New at the Leddy" section to include the degree title of the person.
10. Recommendation: On the Courses tab, under instructors, add a link that would perform the directory look up for the user.
11. * Rename this menu "My Links", to avoid confusion with the SIS system we should stop using it as a descriptor in the portal.
12. * Remove the SIS Web Hours link as it doesn't seem necessary.
13. * Consider renaming this menu as "QuickLinks" to closer reflect the QuickLinks on the rest of the university pages and the mental model that the students have already built around them.
14. * The placement of the menus is slightly confusing and not intuitive. Move "SIS Links" under the "SIS Tools"
15. * Create a section title for the Transcript pages.

[* Recommendations of note that are remaining from the initial report]

Feature Request
1. Feature Request: Online renewal of books would be useful for many.
2. Feature Request: Search for Books, including search for books available on RACER.
3. Feature Request: Some commented that an additional tab for this was unnecessary clutter, that the registration time could be a floating reminder on the academic page.
4. Feature Request: Many asked if there could be a link to departmental societies and student organizations.
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Focus of Further Testing

Here are some topics that I feel need to be further researched for their usability and acceptability

• Meal Plan and UWin Card Functions.
   • Most of the participants did not have money on their meal plan and many did not understand the functions of a UWin Card. As the functionality of the portal in this area improves and more can be done with the UWin card it would be useful to test the functions with the younger students, in particular first year resident students who are likely to have meal plans.

- Transcript Functions.
  - While finding the transcript was easy for most, the additional functions such as, requesting a transcript, were not explored and could pose small problems.
- Newly Added Functions.
  - The Awards Search: Do the concepts of "Received Awards" and "Awards Search" make sense and flow properly.
  - Apply to Graduate and Alumni Information: Are the forms and wording on these pages correct and clear. This could be tested with a group of students before March 1st of this year.
- Help Functions.
  - There are a series of help functions to be proposed and implemented. Do they make sense and are they helpful to the student population? Would the portal benefit from an askuwindsor search? Do students use it currently?