Website Redesign Card Sort

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Executive Summary

In this experiment, six open card sorts were executed with the intent of finding out how users logically organize the information on the Margaret Chase Smith Library (MCSEL) website. The cards were determined by breaking down the current site with a content audit into approximately thirty-five items. An introductory script was then drafted and pilot tests performed to ensure best test practices.

The information from the card sorts was analyzed, compared, and sorted, identifying six main navigation labels as well as sub-groupings and appropriate content. These user-generated labels helped us improve the ambiguous labels on the MCSEL site. Less consistently classified cards emphasized the importance of associative links to supplement hierarchical navigation since users could reasonably expect to find certain items under various headers.

In the end, the card sort resulted in a new information architecture for the website and a revised site map to represent it.
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Introduction

The current layout of the Margaret Chase Smith Library website is confusing to users seeking information. Based on previous user research, our group understood the need for information architecture improvements within the site. The goal of this design deliverable is to create a better navigational structure by planning, organizing, and implementing open card sorts with users. Six individual card sorts were performed using WebSort, an online card sort application. The entire process gave us insight into how users relate and understand items on the MCSL site. Although we used an online application, some of our experiments were done in person to observe behaviors and deliberations in the moment, further fleshing out our understanding of user expectations. The results of these card sorts provided our group with a user-generated taxonomy to help us create a new site map. In summation, the new site map and improved site structure that resulted should help users navigate the site faster, with more confidence, and more logically.
Methodology

We decided to use Websort, an online card sorting site, to collect our data. This web service is free, straightforward, and intuitive, making it an ideal vehicle for our purposes. Each group member chose two participants for the card sorting sessions. Most sessions were done in person though a few were completed remotely.

After conducting an inventory of the site’s existing content, each team member compiled a list of items for the card sort which were then consolidated into a single list and uploaded to Websort. Before presenting the card sort to the participants, it was tested by the researchers first. Through this test, we saw how Websort worked, what issues a participant might run into, and made sure everything ran smoothly. After perfecting the card sort, it was time to recruit participants.

The Margaret Chase Smith Library has information for several different audiences. After previous Observations, Interviews and Questionnaires, we had an idea of what kinds of participants would benefit from the site. We decided to stick with a more general audience, but leaning towards a more academic group. Our participants had all completed their Undergraduate careers and many were Graduate students, but otherwise varied in their backgrounds, with interesting differences and overlaps between them and their expectations.

The process was insightful and it was especially helpful to witness participants in person. These sessions let us observe the thought processes behind some of the more idiosyncratic labels they used as well as the emotional states of these participants. Some participants were chatty, providing commentary throughout the card sort, whereas others were more frustrated and second guessed themselves. Two other participants, however, thought it was fun, and once they got the hang of the card sort they went through the sorting fairly easily and enjoyed themselves.
Findings

By merging user-generated labels from the card sort into functionally similar groups, we wound up with eleven labels, six of which we designated our new global navigation labels. These user-generated labels were clearer than those on the MCSL website, and showed the level of granularity users expected in this content. Remaining groups were classified under the main labels based on affinities between items as observed on Websort.

After merging labels, we used Websort to determine where items belonged and with which other items. There were a few clear standouts, but many items were harder for users to place. This may have been due to the ambiguity of the cards out of context, but it emphasizes the importance of a robust system of associative navigation to improve findability of pages that users could expect to find in several places. The card sort inspired some of the associative links included on the new site map, and could lead to further linkages.

For example, we included online exhibits from the MCSL's “Museum” page in the project to see if users would lump them all together, as on the existing site, or group them thematically with other items. Thematic grouping was common enough to warrant more frequent connections between exhibits or archival documents and related pages throughout the site.

In conclusion, the card sort helped us devise clearer labels and more appropriately granular groupings and even in the case of less conclusive groupings, helped to reinforce the importance of associative navigation across hierarchical navigation.
Conclusion

The card sort served as an excellent way to clean up the Margaret Chase Smith Library website. With the feedback of participants, we were able to create a more concise and clearer website. Through the card sort, we were able to see the site in a new light. Aside from all the changes that we wanted to make, we were now able to recognize what parts of the website belong together and what parts should be separated.

Although at first the list of user-generated labels seemed very overwhelming, after looking over the patterns and similar labels it became incredibly easy to merge the labels together. After merging the labels, it helped us see what the users needed, expected, and wanted. Through these simple steps, we are on our way to improving navigational structure and creating a more user friendly website.
Appendix
Supplementary Materials
Thanks for helping us out! Your input will help us improve the Margaret Chase Smith Library website for a class project. The institution is devoted to the legacy of American congresswoman Margaret Chase Smith.

On the left, you’ll see a list of items. These items represent content that is on the website. Click and drag items onto the empty area in the middle of the screen. Sort these items into groups that you think belong together. You can have as many or as few groups as you’d like. There is no right answer.

Think about which items belong together. Think of where you’d expect to find these items on a web site. When you are done grouping items together, create a label that you think appropriately describes each group.

Feel free to think out loud during your process and ask any questions. However, we can’t help you sort anything - we want your opinion! Do you have any questions before you start?
Card Sort Items

About Us
Biography
Timeline
Margaret Chase Smith’s Awards
Margaret Chase Smith’s Honorary Degrees
Margaret Chase Smith in Congress
FAQs about Margaret Chase Smith
More about Margaret Chase Smith
Audio Recordings
Archival Documents
Correspondence & Letters
Library Policies
Library Newsletters
Case Studies for Research
Museum
Gallery of Margaret Chase Smith’s Outfits
Tour of Margaret Chase Smith’s Home
Exhibit on Margaret Chase Smith and NASA
Margaret Chase Smith’s Life of Service
List of Interviews
Programs
Education Programs
Field Trips
Scholarships
Skowhegan Student Week
Educational Links
Maine Humanities Events
Maine Code of Election Ethics
Maine Town Meeting
Calendar
Directions
Staff
Book Store
Facebook
University of Maine
Card Sort Merged Labels

User-Generated Labels:
- about us
- about us / FAQs
- additional info
- all about margaret
- documentation
- education
- educational links
- educational resources
- educational topics
- events
- external links
- informative media
- interactive?
- library
- library and museum info
- maine
- maine and mcs
- management
- mcs and government
- mcs
- mcs - the woman
- mcs library and museum
- mcs: accolades
- mcs: life
- mcs: work
- museum
- news and archives
- programs/events
- recognition
- research
- resources
- schedule
- school
- visit
- visit us
- what we do

Merged Labels:
- Library
- Research & Archival Docs
- Museum & Exhibits
- About Us
- Visit Us
- MCS: Bio
- MCS: Awards
- MCS: Government
- Maine
- Education
- Events