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Testing Overview

From July to August 2018, mStoner conducted 10 one-on-one, moderated usability testing sessions of the University of North Dakota’s new website via lookback.io. Five sessions were conducted with prospective students, five were conducted with current students. Of the 10 total sessions, five were conducted on desktop and five were conducted on mobile.

In all testing sessions, we asked participants to provide their general impressions of the und.edu homepage and the website’s ease of use. We also asked all participants to find some specific information and complete tasks related to key conversions. The sessions concluded with follow-up questions asking about their experience, their impressions of the new university website, and what changes we could make to the website to make it more appealing or useful to a test participant.

The breakdown of testing participants is as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>User Category</th>
<th>Viewport</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prospective Student, Graduate</td>
<td>Desktop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prospective Student, Undergraduate</td>
<td>Desktop</td>
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<tr>
<td>Prospective Student, Undergraduate</td>
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<td>Prospective Student, Undergraduate</td>
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<td>Prospective Student, Graduate</td>
<td>Mobile</td>
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<tr>
<td>Current Student, Undergraduate</td>
<td>Desktop</td>
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<td>Current Student, Graduate</td>
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<td>Current Student, Graduate</td>
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<td>Current Student, Undergraduate</td>
<td>Mobile</td>
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<tr>
<td>Current Student, Undergraduate</td>
<td>Mobile</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Key Findings

1. Students find UND’s new site bold, modern and highly usable.

All participants had a very positive reaction to the site’s new design, particularly the color, the size of the font, and the quality of the photography. From the homepage, to key landing pages, through the program finder, participants were pleased with the video, photography and design elements throughout the site. Many students specifically commented on how well organized the site appears and how easy it is to get to relevant information.

To dig into perceptions more concretely, we asked participants what words or phrases they would use to describe the new UND site. Here are the words and phrases prospective students gave us:

- “Visually attractive. Easy to find your way around.”
- “I really like it. A lot of things grab your attention. You can tell that they’re very proud of being University of North Dakota.”
- “It’s pretty user friendly. It’s not too hard to find the information you need. Some websites are so convoluted, you don’t know where to start. This lays it out for you. And I like that the font is really big, especially the important parts.”
- “Modern. Inviting.”
- “Clear, concise and easy to navigate. I like the pictures. I hope they are actually UND students, that always impresses me.”

The words and phrases current students gave us indicated that they find the new site a big improvement over the old site:

- “It’s flashy, yet organized.”
- “More innovative. It’s definitely been modernized.”
- “Organized and a lot easier to look at. A lot more user-friendly.”
- “Because of the colors and the pictures, it’s bold and vibrant. It’s an easily accessible user interface. I really like it.”
- “Well it’s not boring, I’ll tell you that. It makes me want to go there.”

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2. The program finder is easier to discover on mobile than desktop.

On desktop, only two of five participants found the program finder without guidance. One participant arrived to the program finder from the “Explore Programs” link on the Academics landing page. One participant found the program finder through the “Online Programs” link on the Academics landing page. The other three, prompted to find information about a program of interest, or a minor, found circuitous ways to that information that circumvented the program finder.

The difference on mobile was striking. When asked to find information about a minor or a program of interest, four of the five mobile participants used the homepage button “Find Programs.” The fifth participant used the menu to go to Academics landing page where she found the “Explore Programs” link after scanning the page.

3. Once they find the program finder, students are delighted with its interactivity, especially the Compare feature.

In total, three of 10 participants were redirected to the program finder, but all had a positive reaction to it. About half the participants used a filter, a few tried out the search bar, but all were able to easily find and compare programs of interest.

Comments from prospective students:
- “This [snapshot] is helpful, to know that it’s on campus.”
- “It’s nice to know how long it’s going to take to complete the degree.”
- Using the Compare feature, “That’s really cool.”
- “I like that it says time to complete, but I’m not sure what BSAT means.”

Comments from current students:
- “This is cool.”
- “This is really nice.”
- “It’s easy to compare. It’s nice to see [program overviews] side-by-side.”
4. Both prospective and current students get the sense that the university offers many student events and activities. However, current students are looking for, and struggling to find, a comprehensive list of clubs and activities.

We asked prospective students where they would go to find out what it’s like to be a student at UND. We asked current students where they would go to learn more about getting involved in clubs and activities. Both prospective and current students responding by visiting the Student Life landing page. One arrived by searching “clubs and activities,” everyone else used the primary navigation. Many participants commented on how helpful the page was, especially because it listed housing and dining information so prominently. Reactions to the page were positive across the board, but current students had trouble finding information specific to clubs and activities. Current students explored the events listed on that page and some even clicked on “Student Involvement,” but three of the five students were unsure whether they had completed the task.

Prospective student comments included:

- “I’ve looked at this page a lot.”
- “[I see] attention grabbing photos, which is really nice, it keeps you interested. Looks like a really cool video. I like the pictures they chose, they make you want to go there. It looks like students are having fun.”
- At the top of the page, “I’m assuming it’s going to show the most popular activities, followed by information about all activities.”

Current student comments included:

- “There’s a lot of clubs. I didn’t know that before.”
- “I like this right here, where they list current events. I’m not from North Dakota, so I like to see what’s going on around here.”
- “Here’s Student Involvement, maybe this is it. Here’s a little bit [about clubs and activities], but it took me to a whole other page with only a few things.”
- “I don’t see a list of clubs, that’s kind of frustrating.”
5. Current students are not yet familiar with their portal page.

While current students were able to complete most test tasks easily, none of our five current student test participants used the “Info for” dropdown or the Current Students page at any point during the testing session. Three current student participants specifically mentioned that they were happy with the placement of logins at the top of the homepage. One student told us that to access the information he needs most often, “I just go to the main page, und.edu, and there's a logins tab and it's got everything I need.” This suggests that students are looking in this space, but they are not yet thinking of “Info for” as a destination that will get them what they need.

This can be explained partly by testing conditions and partly by the newness of the site. Participants were told that they would be testing the new UND site, and were prompted to explore the entire homepage as their first task. Participants’ comments indicated that they recognized the content on the homepage is for prospective students. This put them in a mindset of using the whole site, not just the pages they might visit day-to-day as a current student.

Aside from test conditions, it is normal for current students to take some time to get used to navigation changes on an institution’s site. Many internal audiences, across institutions, rely heavily on Google and site search, especially when they perceive that the primary navigation is oriented toward prospective students. Additionally, more than one current student participant told us that they expected it would get easier to find information as they get used to the new site more. Notably, the current student who gave the site the lowest navigation score (3.5, detailed below) is an incoming freshman whose responses to questions and ways of using the site were more similar to a prospective student than to the other current students. She did not recognize labels such as “Campus Connection” yet, but was still able to complete most tasks successfully.
Additional Quotes and Comments

Design & First Impressions

A number of prospective student participants mentioned in passing that the new UND site looked better and is better organized than other institutions they were considering. A few current student participants mentioned that the homepage seemed a little long, but conceded that it contained quality content. Otherwise, reactions to the site and its design were positive across the board.

Homepage comments from prospective students included:
- “It seems really user-friendly.”
- “It seems like the campus is big. It’s a place with a lot of North Dakota residents and it’s the college of their choice. I’m not so sure about the diversity that’s there yet.”
- “It gives you enough to get interested.”
- Reviewing the UND in Action homepage feature, “This is really cool, that they have featured students. I like that you can see what their students do.”
- “The big, bold writing is good. I like that they have Schedule a Visit [near the top of the page], that’s really easy.”
- “I like how they incorporate social media posts.”

Homepage comments from current students included:
- “I like that the words are bigger. It’s bold, it’s eye-catching, it’s nice to look at, and it tells you what the school’s about.”
- “My favorite thing is definitely the log-ins at the top. I used to have to search for Campus Connection, but now it’s right there.”
- “[The homepage] does a fantastic job of showcasing people.”
- “Big, bold fonts, nice colors.”
- “I like the astronaut [image at the top of the page]. That seems different from other colleges.”
- “It seems a little lengthy to scroll through.”
- Looking at program search bar, “That’s nice, to see if they have my program.”
- “The colors really pop out to me. It looks like everything’s easy to find.”
Additional design comments from elsewhere on the site included:

- “I really like the [styled] numbers. They really grab my attention. I pay attention to the information that’s there.” (Prospective student)
- “I like that the font is really big, especially because I’m not wearing my glasses right now.” (Current student)

**Navigation & Information Architecture**

We asked participants to give the site a score, from one to five, based on how easy it was to use. The average score is a 4.3. These are the comments prospective students gave with their score:

- 5 - “It’s organized, that’s really important.”
- 4 - “It’s really easy to navigate. They have everything here [in the navigation] for you.”
- 5 - “It was very easy. I could find everything very quickly that I needed to find. I had no problem.”
- 4.5 - “It’s a 4 or a 5, depending on what you’re looking for.”
- 5 - “Easy to navigate.”

These are the comments current students gave with their score:

- 4 - “It’s easy, there’s more than one way to find something.”
- 5 - “Seems well organized.”
- 3 - “It will probably get higher as people get used to [the new site].”
- 4 - “You don’t know right away where to go, but you know generally where to look.”
- 3.5 - “Depends what you’re looking for.”

**Immediate Changes**

We asked participants for one or two immediate changes we could make to the site to make more appealing or useful. There was no clear consensus among answers, which suggests that there are likely no changes that are of pressing concern to most student users.
Suggestions for changes from prospective students were:

- “I really have no complaints. I’m really interested in what they have to offer in terms of co-ops and internships. That’s been hard to find.”
- Looking for a page where prospects can get in touch with current students, “A way to contact students who’d be able to answer questions about anything. Maybe through email, [I could say,] ‘hey, I’m an incoming freshmen, I have a question about what I should do with my old books.’ Not things that are academics-related, but life-related.”
- “Financial Aid feels like a lot of clicks.”
- “[Application information] doesn’t specify whether this is weighted or unweighted GPA. Also, I’d put a tab [in the main menu] that links to the UND Aerospace website.”
- “Maybe a rotating [homepage hero space] with highlights or stories.” (This participant was on mobile.)

Suggestions for changes from current students were:

- “The campus map [found via search]. Nothing is labeled. I can’t see more than one location at the time.”
- “Toss the [Fighting Hawks] logo up there. Whether people like it or not, it’s UND’s logo so it should be featured.”
- “I think it’s very appealing compared to what it was.”
- “It says [on the Student Life page] there are 275-plus clubs, but I don’t see where to get that list.”
- “Maybe at the bottom [of the site], a quick find what’s most commonly searched for.”
Recommendations

1. Explore a new visual treatment for links in the landing page feature space on desktop.

While featured content on landing pages is clearly visible on mobile, the links in this feature space are less visible to site visitors on desktop. While desktop participants noticed featured videos on both the Admissions & Financial Aid and Student Life pages, only one of five saw the “Explore Programs” link under Academics. Additionally only one of five participants appeared to notice the “See What’s Happening at UND” link on the Student Life page. This suggests that visitors are seeing this section, but their eyes are drawn to the videos and photos, not the text links. A new approach to this feature section will let visitors know that this is important information that they should read. For example, consider changing the link to a button or use a card style where the whole text block, image and call-to-action are clickable. See images below for reference.

On the Student Life page feature section, pictured above, all desktop participants noticed the video, but only one noticed the accompanying link.
Four out of five desktop participants scrolled past the featured content on the Academics landing page, featured above, with no comment.

2. Relabel the link “Student Involvement” on the Student Life page. Consider adding a link on the Student Life page directly to a list of student organizations.

While all of our current student participants found the Student Life page easily, three of five struggled to find any details about specific clubs or activities on campus. Two clicked “Student Involvement,” but did not feel this page moved them closer to their goal. The student who used site search to look for “clubs and activities” was one of the three who did not find any clubs, but spent time exploring events and programming. All five were hoping for a link from the Student Life page directly to a list of clubs, activities or organizations.

Part of the reason students struggled with this task may be that the Student Involvement page still features the old design and has not been updated yet. However, the more significant reason is that students’ expectations of how to find this information does not align with the language on the student life page. For this reason, consider changing the “Student Involvement” link to “Get Involved” or “Discover Clubs and Activities.” Additionally, try experimenting with a new headline in the carousel in place of “Expand your horizons” as this did not signal activities and organizations to most participants.
Appendix

Testing Sessions