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Introduction



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Joe is the Web Services Librarian at the Reed College Library. He has written and presented on service design, UX tools, library space assessment, website usability, and marketing of the library. He recently co-authored *Library Service Design: a LITA Guide* and will have a follow-up workbook titled *Getting Started in Service Design* to be published in summer 2017. His current research interests involve service design in the library environment and space usage assessment. He has an MLIS from the University of Washington iSchool and an MBA from Portland State University. Joe is the co-founder of the LUX Service Design consulting firm.

In recent years, UX research has become more commonplace in libraries across the country. This is a good thing. The downside is that UX has become synonymous with the user interface. However, the user experience is more than just a human-computer interaction. The user's experience encompasses the whole experience a user has with the library, whether that be while searching the library catalog for a book, retrieving the book from the stacks, or checking the book out. The user experience is not a single interaction, but rather a series of micro interactions. As a user moves across "interfaces," she is constantly faced with challenges that she must navigate to complete her task successfully. To me, our job as librarians is to make those smaller interactions as fluid and unhindered as possible—in a word, seamless.

As librarians, we are entrusted with the overall experience that our patrons have with the library. And this caring for the experience is not just limited to user experience or web services librarians; it is a task all librarians and library staff should participate in and contribute to. Libraries are tightly coupled systems. They are essentially systems, both cultural and virtual, nested within systems that are dependent upon each other. As we alter the input for one system, we more than likely affect another system farther downstream. As a result, it is essential for all library employees to take an interest in the user experience and listen to our patrons. It is important to take a systems level approach to our work and the user experience. Our patrons are the reason our libraries exist. As our patrons evolve, so must our services and service delivery model. As such, we should work to understand current needs and expectations to make the best possible user experience.



So, why are there bees on the cover? Bees represent a near perfect system. For me, understanding the user experience requires a holistic, systems approach. On the surface, we see thousands of insects buzzing and humming. But as you begin to look closer, you will see tasks broken down and responsibilities divided among members of the hive. And, not only are they tightly coupled as a superorganism, but they are also highly dependent on and coupled with their surrounding environment. As their environment changes, those changes are reflected in the health of the colony. Understanding the user experience is similar to looking at a beehive. To witness the experience, we need to see not only the bees but also the larger ecology in which they exist.

This issue of *OLA Quarterly* is about the state of user experience efforts in Oregon. This collection of excellent articles not only emphasizes the importance of including the users in the design process, but they also stress the importance of actually including users at all! After reading these submissions, I hope that you will see that Oregon libraries value the opinions of their users and are user focused.

What is it like to be a young reader looking for books on princesses? **Steven Engelfried** of the Wilsonville Public Library explains the process that helped the WPL staff to better understand young readers' (and their parents') needs by creating a young readers section based on age and interest.

After analyzing user feedback to help inform their website redesign, **Crystal Trice** shares with us the usability testing techniques that were used at the Washington County Cooperative Library Services.

Stephanie Chase of the Hillsboro Public Library has embraced the next level of user-centered research and has taken a design thinking approach to understanding how patrons use the library and what steps to take to make their experience better.

Aja Bettencourt-McCarthy and **Dawn Lowe-Wincentsen** of Oregon Institute of Technology have written a great piece on website usability testing. In their article, they emphasize the importance of user testing with A/B testing, card sorting, and focus groups, reinforcing the idea that UX testing is never actually complete.

Nothing beats having a personal librarian. And nothing beats these two articles on separate personal librarian programs at Reed College and the Multnomah County Library system. My colleague at Reed College, **Erin Connor**, explains the process we use for all incoming first-year students; she then shows how reaching out to students in their first year at college can play a role in a successful career in higher education. **Matthew Stefanik**, an MCL personal librarian, shares the experience of participating in a personal librarian program at one of the largest public systems in the country. As a patron of this service while I was looking for books for my oldest son, I can attest to the professionalism and expertise I experienced as a user.

Valery King of OSU Libraries and **Meggie Wright** of Lane Community College share the importance of ongoing UX assessment to keep up with an evolving student body, reminding us not to forget the physical environment as a touchpoint. 

