Da'Ja A. Franks

Dr. Feng Liu

INFM400/412

8 October 2026

Final Report

Executive Summary

Students often need to find information about financial aid, class registration, academic advising, and other university services. Sometimes this information is difficult to find on the Mercer website. Students may have to search through several pages or those specifically in the Working Adults program, often contacting Student Ambassadors to get assistance in finding answers. Student Ambassadors help to support Working Adult program students with finding Mercer information but often encounter difficulties as well with information being outdated or wrong. Ultimately, there should be a more centralized way of getting Mercer information that is easy to find and satisfactory for all with the information provided.

The purpose of the research is to study how students find information on a university website and identify ways to make the process easier. The project will focus specifically on the information provided for the Working Adults program students. The overall process of the research will involve studying the navigation of the website, the information students need, and the problems they face when searching.

The research will include a website usability evaluation and interviews with students and Student Ambassadors. The website evaluation will help identify navigation problems on the

Mercer website. The interviews will help explain which information students need most often and what makes it difficult to find. The results will be used to design a university information directory.

The main goal of this research project is to create a directory prototype. As it is my final deliverable, it will include important information, such as financial aid contacts, academic advisor information, class registration instructions, and university services to help Working Adult students. The directory will organize these details in the same place to make the process of the search more seamless with less confusion.

Introduction

The idea for this project came from the personal experience of being a student ambassador. As a student ambassador, the information obtained about Mercer contacts and internal processes can involve multiple sources. If the information is not easy to remember or find, it can take a while to get the correct answer. If Student Ambassadors have these difficulties, it can also be hard for normal students who do not have experience working at Mercer. This can lead to confusion and frustration and make simple tasks take longer than they should.

These experiences showed the need for a better way to organize university information. Students and student ambassadors should be able to find accurate information without having to search through multiple sources. Especially when there is no guarantee that it is up-to-date and accurate. These findings led me to consider how a centralized information directory with features such as automatic updates and answering specific inquiries could make university information easier to find and improve the type of information provided to students.

Research Question

The project's research question is: How can a Mercer information-related directory improve students' ability to find important information compared to the existing Mercer University website? This question focuses on how students search for information and what can be done to make the process easier.

The hypothesis for this project is that students will be able to find important university information faster and more successfully using the proposed information directory than using the existing university website. The directory is expected to make information easier to access by placing useful links and resources together. Usability testing once the prototype is close to completion will help determine whether the directory improves the process. Students will complete similar tasks using both systems so their results can be compared.

The independent variable is the information-finding method being used. This includes the existing university website and the proposed informational directory. The dependent variables are the results measured during usability testing. These results will show how well each system helps students find information. Task completion will measure whether students successfully find the information requested. Time will measure how long students take to complete each task. Navigation errors will measure how often students make incorrect selections or have trouble finding the right information. Ease of use will measure how easy students say each system is to use. User satisfaction will measure how students describe their overall experience with each system.

The hypothesis will be evaluated by comparing the results from the existing website and the proposed directory. If students complete tasks faster, make fewer navigation errors, and

report a better experience with the directory, this would support the hypothesis. If the results show little improvement, the directory may need changes to its layout or the way information is organized or provided. The results will help show whether a centralized directory is a useful way to improve students' access to university information.

Proposed Research Methodology

The main research objective is to understand the process behind each Student Ambassador's method of helping Working Adult program students, if it involves a directory, and what frequently asked questions do they come across regularly from Working Adult students. When it comes to Working Adults program students, the main goal is to find out their experience when it comes to finding Mercer-related information: how do they find it and do they find themselves needing help.

The research method would be to first do usability testing research on the Mercer website using the experience as both a student and Student Ambassador navigating the site to find current issues and pertinent information for Working Adult students. Afterwards, semi-structured interviews would be conducted for both Working Adult students and student ambassadors. Preplanned questions would be asked to allow open discussion to be made. Then, the responses would be recorded by writing them down during the interview and reviewing them later to begin developing the application.

The first step in the timeline is to find usability issues and conduct heuristic testing with the Mercer website. This will involve looking through the website to find information that Working Adult students may need, such as academic advising, faculty contacts, registration instructions, and other university resources. The evaluation will focus on how easy it is to locate

information and whether the website makes the process confusing or difficult. The findings will help identify which types of information should be included in the proposed directory.

The second step is to develop questions for interviews. The questions will focus on how student ambassadors help Working Adult students and how Working Adult students find information on their own. Questions will be prepared before the interviews, but participants will also be allowed to explain their answers and share other experiences. This will help gather useful information without limiting the discussion to only the prepared questions.

The third step is to interview with current Student Ambassadors. These interviews will focus on the questions Working Adult students ask most often and the steps ambassadors take to find answers. The interviews will also explore whether ambassadors already use a directory or other resources to help students. This information can show which resources are used most often and what information would be helpful to include in one central location.

The fourth step is to interview with current Working Adults program students. These interviews will focus on students' experiences finding Mercer-related information. Students will be asked where they usually look for answers, what information is difficult to find, and whether they need help from student ambassadors or university staff. Their responses will help identify problems that may not be clear from reviewing the website alone.

The fifth step is to review notes to gather my research findings. After the interviews, the notes will be reviewed to identify common answers, repeated questions, and problems shared by participants. The results from the website evaluation will also be compared with the interview findings. This will help determine which issues should be addressed first and what information needs to be included in the directory.

The sixth step is to create directory. The directory will be designed around the information and resources found during the research. It may include helpful links, university contacts, advising information, and instructions for common student tasks. The goal is to organize useful information in one place so students and Student Ambassadors can find answers without searching through several different website pages.

The seventh step is to conduct usability testing for the directory. Participants will be asked to complete common information-finding tasks using the directory. Their success in completing each task, the time taken, and any navigation errors will be recorded. Participants will also be asked about how easy the directory was to use. These results will help show whether the directory makes finding information easier than using the existing website.

The final step is to make improvements. The usability testing results will be reviewed to identify parts of the directory that are confusing or difficult to use. Changes may include reorganizing information, improving labels, or making important resources easier to access. The goal is to create a directory that meets the needs of Working Adult students and helps student ambassadors answer questions more efficiently.

Proposed Data Collection Instrument

This project will use a mixed-methods research design, which combines qualitative and quantitative research. Qualitative research will come from semi-structured interviews with current student ambassadors and Working Adult program students. These interviews will help explain their experiences, common questions, and problems with finding information. Quantitative research will come from usability testing, where task completion, time spent finding information, and navigation errors can be measured. The participants will include current Student

Ambassadors and current Working Adult program students. Their names will not be included in the final report to protect their privacy.

The data collection instruments will include a usability test, a heuristic evaluation, and semi-structured interviews. The usability test will ask participants to complete common tasks on the university website, such as finding financial aid contact information, tutoring information, and the academic calendar. The time taken and success of each task will be recorded. This will help show how easily users can find important information.

The heuristic evaluation will be completed on both the existing university website and the proposed information directory. Each system will be reviewed using usability principles such as consistency, clear navigation, error prevention, and ease of use. Problems will be recorded and given a severity rating based on how much they affect the user. Comparing the results will help identify which parts of the directory work well and which areas need improvement.

The interviews will begin with a short introduction explaining the purpose of the research and how the participants' answers will be kept confidential. Participants will be asked for permission to take notes before the questions begin. The interviews will use prepared, open-ended questions while allowing participants to share additional details about their experiences.

Student Ambassadors will be asked about common student questions, the resources they use to find answers, and the challenges they face when locating accurate information. Students will be asked how they search for university information, which parts of the website are difficult to use, and what changes could make the process easier. Each interview will end by giving participants a chance to share any additional thoughts.

After the interviews and usability tests, the notes and results will be reviewed for common problems and patterns. Interview responses will be summarized and compared with the findings from the website evaluations. These findings will help determine which information should be included in the directory and which features should be given the most attention. The results will also guide changes after the proposed directory is tested.

Project Planning Report

The purpose of this project is to improve how students find important university information by creating a centralized information directory. The project will use website evaluations, interviews, and usability testing to identify problems and develop solutions. The final goal is to create a directory that is easy to use and provides helpful information in one place. The results will also help show whether the directory is a useful improvement over the existing university website.

The project is expected to take eight weeks to complete. Each week will focus on a different part of the research and design process. The first two weeks will be used to review the university website and identify usability problems. During the third week, interview questions will be prepared and participants will be contacted. The fourth week will focus on conducting interviews with front desk workers and students. In the fifth week, the research findings will be reviewed to identify common problems and decide what information should be included in the directory. The sixth week will be used to design and create the directory. During the seventh week, participants will test the directory by completing common information-finding tasks. The final week will be used to make improvements based on the test results and finish the project report.

The people who are most important to this project are university students and Student Ambassadors. Students need a clear way to find information about university services and complete common tasks. Student Ambassadors may benefit from having a central place to look for answers when helping students. Their feedback will help make sure the directory is useful for both groups.

The resources needed for the project include access to the university website, interview questions, a way to record research notes, and a tool for creating the directory. Time will also be needed to meet with participants, review their responses, and test the design. The directory will be based on the research findings so that its content reflects the needs of the people who may use it.

One possible challenge is finding enough participants who are available for interviews and usability testing. If participants have changes in their availability, the project schedule may need to be adjusted. Another risk is that some university information may be difficult to locate or may change over time. The directory will need clear links to reliable sources so users can reach the most current information.

There is also a chance that the first version of the directory will not meet every user's needs. Some features may be confusing, or users may expect information that was not included in the original design. Usability testing will help identify these issues before the project is finished. If major problems are found, changes will be made based on the available time and the importance of each issue.

The final deliverable will include the proposed information directory and a summary of the research findings. The report will explain the main usability problems, the needs identified

through interviews, and the results of testing the directory. The usability test results will help show whether the directory improves task completion, reduces the time needed to find information, and lowers navigation errors. Together, these results will provide a clear explanation of how the directory was developed and what improvements were made. The project will be considered successful if the final design provides useful information in an organized way and gives users a more direct path to the answers they need.