Outreach to International Students and Scholars Using the World Wide Web

Wei Wei
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By Wei Wei

In the United States, engineering departments have tended to attract a great many foreign students, faculty and other researchers. With the establishment of an engineering department at the University of California, Santa Cruz, the Science Library faced many challenges. One of these was how to serve the department's increasing international population. In order to serve them well, the Science Library International Outreach Program was established in spring 1997.

The traditional methods of marketing library services had been to create flyers, brochures and newsletters and post them on campus, or mail them to the UCSC science community. The creation of the Internet, however, has completely changed these methods. The World Wide Web has become the tool of choice for reaching our clients. Therefore, a Web site for the International Outreach Program was created at an early stage in the development of the Program.

Design

Design elements are key to the success of this new tool. “Good design means pertinent information. Good design means content. Good design means good surfing, exploring, gathering.” [1] Before the first version was developed, the librarian investigated other Web sites. Special attention was paid to the layouts and color presentations of these Web sites. A prototype for the layout screens was then developed. The principal goals in creating the design prototype were to achieve simplicity, clarity, and attractiveness of presentation. Moving images and color were incorporated into the prototype Web pages. Rotating icons and colors in contrast help guide the user's focus and make the presentation more attractive.

A very useful book by Scott Arpajian, entitled How to Use HTML 3. [2] was consulted during the process of creating the HTML documents for the Web site.

Content

The librarian designing the Web site met with members of the science faculty individually in their offices to introduce the project and demonstrate the prototype screens before the Web site was published. The demonstration included the layout of the Web pages, their color presentations, the images used in the Web pages, and the contents of the site. A primary goal in marketing the new program this way was to bring the science faculty into the design process and elicit suggestions and opinions on what the content should be. In addition, this was an excellent way to become acquainted with faculties who have contacts with foreign colleagues in the sciences--one of the target audiences for the proposed Web site.

The same sort of outreach approach was used in communicating with other campus offices in the sciences and with the international community itself. The Office of Graduate Studies for the sciences gave valuable feedback for the content of the Web site. As illustrated in Fig. 1, this Web site serves as a gateway to a great variety of online services. The user may consult the Home Page of the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Consular Affairs, which presents a wide range of information on international travel and related subjects of interest to the international community at UCSC. Also available is World News, which connects the user to an online database providing information produced by the Foreign Broadcast Information Service. Survival Tips has cultural and related information to help the international student feel at ease and succeed scholastically in his new environment. And, Yahoo Weather will put the visitor in touch with the more familiar climate of his home country or other travel sites. These are

(See Figure 1 Home Page)
but a very few of the multitude of resources available for navigation through this Web site. The Office of Graduate Studies also gave useful suggestions on how to reach out to the international students before they come to the United States. The Computer Science/Engineering Department routinely gives Internet passwords to its new international students before they arrive in America to begin their academic careers. These students can access campus information, library resources and library instruction while they are still in their home countries. The Web site therefore serves as a timely, one-on-one marketing tool for the International Outreach Program.

(See Figure 2 Statement of Purpose)

Promotion of the Site
Once the Web site for the program was developed, its URL (Universal Research Locator) was widely publicized on campus via e-mail and traditional printed sources. Its use was then demonstrated in tours given to foreign students and other academic visitors. The information regarding the Science Library International Outreach Program and its Web site with its URL were also announced and advertised in the Science Library Newsletter, and in workshop flyers designed for foreign students, scholars, and faculty.

Summary
The Web is, indeed, "a magnificent experiment in communications." [3] However, it is important to realize that this magnificent experiment is not yet widely available in most developing countries. Traditional outreach methods will still be necessary for some foreign student clients until they arrive at the home site for the outreach program. What these students experience once they reach the high technology environment of an academic community in the United States will help serve as a basis for change when they return home.

The URL for the Science Library International Outreach Program is:
http://bob.ucsc.edu/library/science/inter/index.htm

Citations

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Science Library International Outreach Program

More Information:

Handbook for UCSC International Students, Scholars, and Faculty

Flags of Nations
Fulbright Grants
International Resources
MapQuest
NAFSA: Association of International Educators
Travel Channel
UC Systemwide Education Abroad Program
U.S. Department of State: The Bureau of Consular Affairs
World News
World News Connection
Yahoo Weather
Statement of Purpose

The Science Library International Outreach Program plans to provide UCSC international students and scholars of sciences with instruction in the use of traditional and electronic information resources. The goal of the program is to show UCSC international researchers how an American academic library is arranged and to teach them the library research skills that they need in this complex and changing world of information. Another important function of the outreach program is the marketing of the Science Library services to the UCSC students, staff, faculty, the target community and associations. The program also plans to coordinate efforts with the UCSC International Programs and Activities, and UCSC Education Abroad Program as well as the International Programs at UCSC Extension to design specific programs that international researchers need.