



# Methodological Triangulation: Evaluation of Drexel University Libraries Website

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## BACKGROUND

Academic library websites serve as key points of entry for users seeking information and resources; however, due to lack of staff resources and a “captive audience” of students, the design and effectiveness of these websites is not often formally evaluated. Based on a study of the Drexel University Libraries’ website, this poster explores the effectiveness of the libraries’ web presence through a methodological triangulation approach.

Triangulation refers to the application of multiple investigative approaches to enhance confidence in the resulting findings. To this end, the methodologies applied consisted of a survey, ethnographic observation, user tests, heuristic evaluation and cognitive walk-through. The selected research methods supported several cross-methodological findings including confusion around language, organization, and structure, as well as a user base that remained perpetual novices. Additionally, this research provides opportunities and ideas for future user-based evaluation of library websites and services.

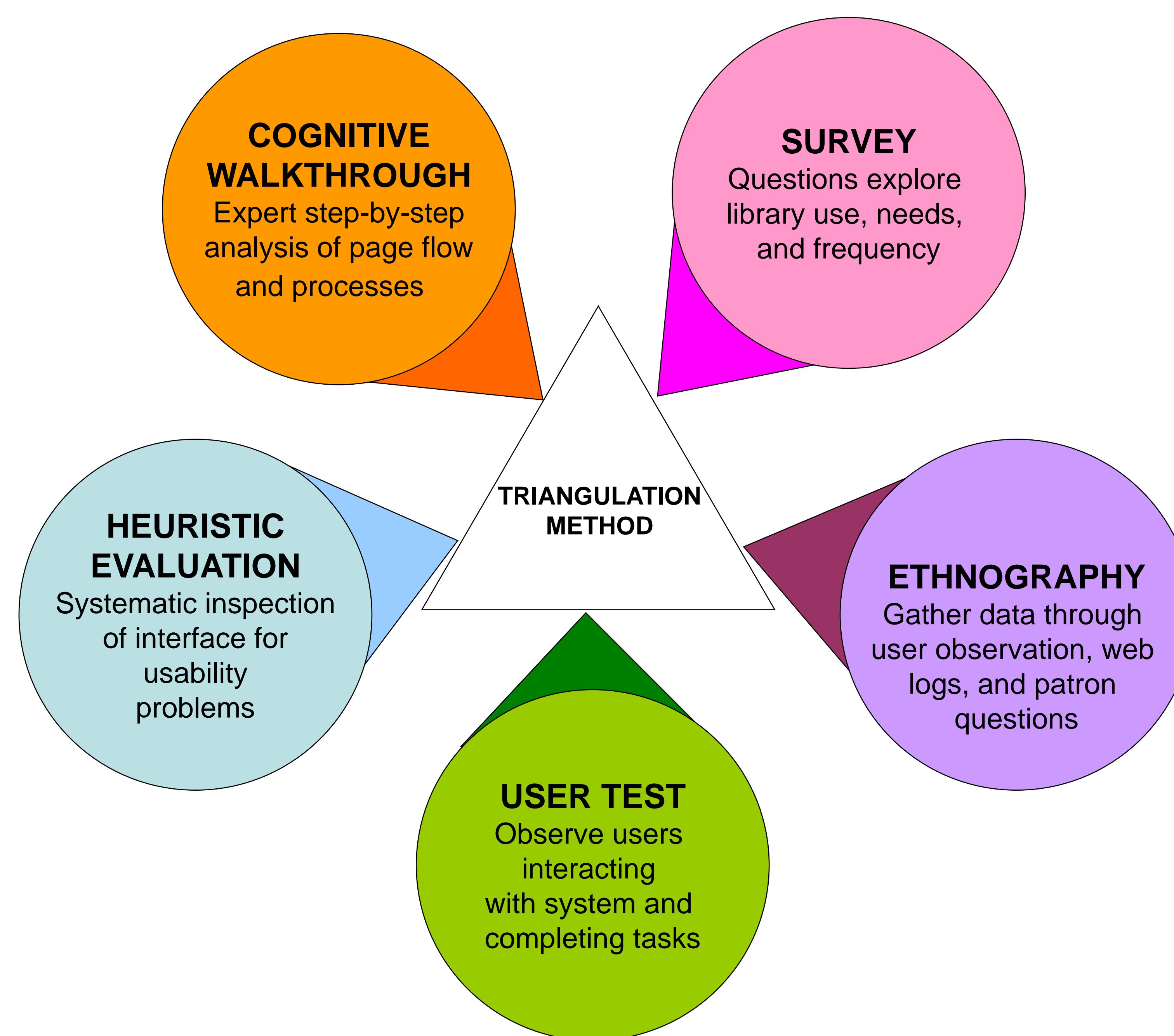
## PURPOSE AND HYPOTHESIS

The purpose of this study was to explore the effectiveness of the Drexel University Libraries’ homepage and whether it was successfully meeting student needs. The hypothesis assumed that there were consistent usability issues with the homepage, and that these issues would surface and be verifiable across multiple investigative methods.

The goal of this research was to provide design recommendations to improve the libraries’ website. These changes were implemented in the months following the completion of the study.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

This research was conducted as a five-part study of the libraries’ website over the course of two months. Each portion of the study employed different groups of Drexel University undergraduates, all with novice-level library experience.



1. Survey – investigated usage of library website and services.
2. Ethnographic Study – observed users interacting with librarians at the reference desk, gathered web logs and compiled usage data.
3. User Test – observed and gathered data as users completed a series of tasks on the libraries’ website.
4. Heuristic Evaluation – inspected interface for common usability problems or issues.
5. Cognitive Walkthrough – expert task analysis on a step-by-step basis to identify potential problems.

## RESULTS

Consistent patterns of behavior and problems occurred across all research methods. These findings can inform user interface changes and are as follows.

- In general, there is a high level of confusion and lack of confidence with library tools and services
- Library-oriented language and jargon is confusing
- The catalog is widely understood and used
- Most users remain perpetual novices
- Instruction (from professors or librarians) largely dictates what services students will feel comfortable using

## CONCLUSIONS

Triangulating research methods is an effective way to identify and cross-validate research findings. It can be especially effective in environments where a broad set of data and sources are available (such as access to web logs and the ability to observe users in real-time) and where there is little existing data regarding user behavior.

## SOURCES

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