Evaluating the web sites of county public libraries in New Jersey for Hispanic accessibility

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EVALUATING THE WEB SITES OF COUNTY PUBLIC LIBRARIES IN NEW JERSEY FOR HISPANIC ACCESSIBILITY

by
Geraldine Paolini

A Thesis
Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Master of Arts Degree of The Graduate School at Rowan University May 13, 2005

Approved by

Date Approved May 9, 2005

c 2005 Geraldine Paolini
ABSTRACT

Geraldine Paolini
EVALUATING THE WEB SITES OF COUNTY PUBLIC LIBRARIES IN NEW JERSEY FOR HISPANIC ACCESSIBILITY
2005
Dr. Marilyn Shontz
Master of Arts in School and Public Librarianship

A library’s web site can be an important outreach service for Hispanic patrons. Many county libraries in New Jersey, however, may not have web sites that are easily accessible to Hispanics. The purpose of this study was to evaluate New Jersey county public library web sites to determine if selected access criteria were present. Using a researcher designed criteria checklist, content, language, organization & navigation and services were examined. The existence of these criteria were used to determine if public library web sites provided adequate access for Hispanic patrons. The sample and population consisted of 20 county library, or their equivalent, web sites in New Jersey. Salem County was not included in this study.

Results showed that most of the criteria were not present on the majority of the web sites studied. The criterion found most commonly on these public library web sites was the availability of a Spanish-language database. Two of the criteria that were found the least were a Spanish web site that mirrored the English version and a language link that was located in a clearly visible area of the home page. Libraries A and M had the highest frequency counts for all criteria among the 20 web sites that were examined.
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CHAPTER 1

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Introduction

One of the many communities served by a public library is the Hispanic one. “Data from the 2000 Census show that ‘the Hispanic population...is projected to become the largest U.S. minority group by 2005’, comprising 12.6% of the U.S. population” (Buck, Millikan, Rider & Smith, 2004, ¶ 1). New Jersey in particular is a state with a large Hispanic population at 13.3% according to the U.S. Census (http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/34000.html). “Various studies show that approximately half of the United States Hispanic population is Spanish-dominant in conversation” (Marquis, 2003, Abstract, ¶ 2). Due the language barrier, the library’s resources and services may not be easily accessible to Hispanics. One service in particular that has information that can be widely available but may be difficult to access because of language is the library’s web site.

A public library’s web site is an important out reach service. People who know little or no English, or who are not familiar with the public library, may be intimidated to visit and find out about library services. A web site is an anonymous way for people to find out information on their own before making a trip to the library. If the information on a web site is incomprehensible, however, then that first trip to the library may not occur.
Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to evaluate New Jersey county public library web sites to determine if selected access criteria were present. The existence of these criteria were used to determine if the public library web sites provided adequate access for Hispanic patrons. This study was based on the following research questions: What are the criteria for evaluating library web sites for Hispanic accessibility? How accessible are the 20 New Jersey county library, or their equivalent, web sites to Hispanics?

Definition of Terms

Community: For the purpose of this study, community is defined as a group of people with a common characteristic or interest living together within a larger society (Merriam-Webster Online).

County public library: For the purpose of this study, a county public library is the main branch of a New Jersey library system.

Hispanic: For the purpose of this study, Hispanic is defined as anyone who is dominantly Spanish speaking (Marquis, 2003, Abstract, ¶ 4).

Library resources and services: For the purpose of this study, library resources are defined as the materials available through the library, for example books, periodicals, audio/visual and electronic material. For the purpose of this study, library services are defined as the circulation of resources, reference help and programs available through the library.

Out reach service: For the purpose of this study, out reach service is defined as a service designed to meet the needs of users who are under served or unserved, for example those who are not fluent in the national language (Reitz, 2004).
Patron: For the purpose of this study, a patron is any person who uses the resources and services of the library, not necessarily a registered borrower (Reitz, 2004).

Public library: For the purpose of this study, public library is defined as a library or library system that provides unrestricted access to library resources and services free of charge to all the residents of a given community, district or geographic region, supported wholly or in part by public funds (Reitz, 2004).

Spanish language: For the purpose of this study, Spanish language and Spanish will be used interchangeably; they are defined as the Romance language of the largest part of Spain and of the countries colonized by Spaniards (Merriam-Webster Online).

Web site: A group of related, interlinked web pages installed on a web server and accessible 24 hours a day to Internet users equipped with browser software to represent the online presence of a public library (Reitz, 2004).

Assumptions and Limitations

It was assumed that the geographic areas of the 20 county libraries of New Jersey had some Hispanic population. It was further assumed that these Hispanic patrons were trying to use or were using these public library web sites.

The scope of this study was limited to 20 counties in New Jersey. Essex, Hudson, Middlesex, Passaic, and Union counties did not have a county library web site so another equivalent library which serves a significant number of people in the county population was chosen instead. Due to the fact that Salem County did not have a county library or its equivalent, it was not used in this study. The study was also limited by time constraints. The non-random sample of this study limited its generalizability. The study was also
limited to the appearance and content of the county public library web site at the time accessed by the researcher.
References


CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

It is important that members of the Hispanic community are able to access information in Spanish from a public library’s web site. To date, very little research on this topic has been done, so this study can serve as a basis for future studies.

Research

Shapiro (2003) semi-randomly selected five public library systems, nation wide, to examine their web sites. The five libraries he evaluated were already considered “leaders in the field of developing electronic library resources for Spanish-speaking populations” (Shapiro, 2003, Evaluation of Five Public Libraries, ¶ 3). The strengths of these web sites noted by Shapiro were the inclusion of bilingual databases, information about library services written in Spanish, policies written in Spanish, and an online catalog written in Spanish. He also observed the use of the word Espanol instead of Spanish as a link to the Spanish version of the homepage and its placement on the page. Other noteworthy characteristics of these web sites were the inclusion of Spanish language reference support, access to online Spanish language newspapers and magazines, and links that described the Spanish collection. He also found these web sites were easy to navigate.

Zelter and Polk (2002) wrote about a pilot project concerning the accessibility of library services to Hispanics conducted in 1998 by the King County Library System (KCLS). Through the use of open-ended questions, KCLS hoped to discover community
perceptions of the public library and its services. The researchers reported that Hispanics
were not visiting the libraries in numbers that reflected their demographics, largely due to
language barriers. “Those who were using the library did so to check out videos and CDs,
but were confused by why or how fines were levied for overdue items” (Zelter & Polk,
2002, ¶ 3). The need for having information available in Spanish was significant to the
Hispanics in this study in their experience with the library and its services. One of the
many resources that the KCLS translated into Spanish was a portion of their web site.

Recommendations for Public Library Web Sites

Wanda Reinford, reference librarian at the San Antonio Public Library, provided
a short list of her guidelines for creating public library web sites with Spanish language
information. These guidelines are useful criteria for evaluating already existing public
library web sites. Reinford recommended that when providing Spanish-language
information on a web site, one should not expect a Spanish-speaking patron to dig deeply
to find it; a link directly from the home page was ideal. She also mentioned that a variety
of Spanish language resources (catalog, library card application, recommended links,
etc.) should be linked together on one page. Finally, the terms “Spanish” and
“Hispanic/Latino” should not be used interchangeably in categorizing recommended web
links (Reinford, 2002).

Marquis (2003) referred to additional suggestions for Spanish language web pages
that were made by Reinford. Reinford’s suggestions included organizing all of the
library’s Spanish language web links under one easily accessible heading (in Spanish)
near the top of the library’s site and using Spanish or bilingual link names when directing
searchers to Spanish language web sites. Reinford also suggested not to combine links to
English language web resources of possible interest to Hispanics with links to Spanish language web sites (Marquis, 2003). At the end of the article, Marquis provided a list of “Exemplary Public Library Web Sites for the Spanish-Speaking.” Marquis’ web site list provided a good basis on which to evaluate other public library web sites. One of Marquis’ web sites included a “suggestion box” so that Hispanic users could give feedback. Pokorny stated, “there is no one better to assess needs, provide advice and make recommendations than the patrons themselves” (Pokorny, 2003, ¶ 20).

Other Library Services

Lupien (2004), a librarian in New Brunswick, Canada, wrote about the use of bilingual virtual reference. Virtual reference is a service sometimes provided through a public library’s web site. As part of this service, he suggested giving people information about the library itself, and directing them to pages about library hours and services. He noted that it was also important that accent marks appear correctly; “for instance, can a Spanish speaker type a question using the inverted question mark?” (Lupien, 2004, Evaluating the Software, ¶ 6). Lupien’s suggestions served as additional criteria for evaluating public library web sites for their accessibility to Hispanics.

The OPAC, or online public access catalog, which can be accessed through library web pages, should also be made available in Spanish. Not only is the OPAC itself important, but the way the Hispanic collection is catalogued in the OPAC is also important. Buck; et al., stated that “…resources will not benefit the community unless individual patrons access them” (Buck; et al., 2004, ¶ 20). In this case, if Hispanics cannot tell if the library has Spanish language materials, how can they access them?
Jensen (2001) also studied the accessibility and usefulness of the OPAC for the monolingual Spanish-reading user (Libraries for All, Catalogs for Some, ¶ 3). He determined that if a library does not have a good Spanish language OPAC, it would make no difference how great the Spanish language interface of the library’s web site was. Jensen also observed that often when the “notes” field of a Spanish language title contained any text, it was written in English. As Jensen pointed out, a tight budget and limited funds were often used as justification for inadequate records on a public library catalog. “Money spent on enhanced cataloging would only rob Spanish-reading users of materials. Seen another way, minimally useful cataloging is another kind of robbery. It arguably deprives users of the books they want and need by concealing them in the stacks” (Jensen, 2001, Another Kind of Robbery, ¶ 2 &3).

Bilingual services are not a new concept. In 1906, James Hulme Canfield, librarian of Columbia University, recommended that libraries and the American Library Association should prepare pamphlets in other languages to inform and educate immigrants (Pokorny, 2003). A public library’s web site is essentially a series of electronic pamphlets linked together. Useful information, as suggested by Jensen and de la Pena Cook, that could be made available on the Hispanic web pages of a library’s web site included “first aid, health issues, state and labor laws, including information about minimum wage and mandated breaks” (Pokorny, 2003, ¶ 29).

Summary of Literature Review

Although there has been very little research on the evaluation of library web sites for Hispanic accessibility, the literature found suggested that providing bilingual electronic resources for Hispanic patrons was necessary. More important, however, than
having Spanish language web pages was the quality of these web sites. The literature also discussed information that could be used as recommendations and criteria when evaluating web sites.
References


CHAPTER 3
METHODOLOGY

Overall Design and Justification

This study of evaluating the web sites for 20 of the county public libraries, or their equivalent, in New Jersey used survey research, specifically observational research. According to Powell, “in an observational study, the current status of a phenomenon is determined not by asking but by observing” (1997, p.117). Results of this study offered librarians an awareness of the accessibility or lack of accessibility of their library web sites to Hispanic patrons. This information could help resolve lack of accessibility to web sites due to a culture or language barrier for Hispanics.

This study was survey/descriptive, which “is a group of research methodologies commonly used to determine the present status of a given phenomenon” (Powell, 1997, p. 57). Since survey research is typically applied to studying current situations, a survey/descriptive study was favorable for examining the current status of accessibility to Hispanic patrons in the 20 county public libraries of New Jersey.

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to evaluate 20 of the New Jersey county public library web sites, or their equivalent, to determine if selected access criteria were present. The existence of these criteria determined if the web sites did provide better access to Hispanic patrons.

This study was based on the following research questions:
1. What are the criteria for evaluating library web sites for Hispanic accessibility?

2. How accessible are the 20 New Jersey county libraries, or their equivalent, web sites to Hispanics?

Sample and Population

The sample and population for this study were the same. The sample and population consisted of 20 county libraries, or their equivalent, in New Jersey (see Appendix A). The web addresses for the web sites were obtained via searching the Internet.

Variables

The independent variable was the content of the web sites. The dependent variables were the criteria used to evaluate these web sites, as included on the checklist. One intervening variable was consistent and reliable access to the Internet.

Data Collection

The web site addresses for the 20 county libraries of New Jersey were obtained through the Internet. The web sites were then visited by the researcher and evaluated between the dates of February 19, 2005 and March 7, 2005. The tool for evaluation was a researcher designed criteria checklist, which consisted of 27 items. These items were broken down into four categories: (a) Content Criteria, or what was available in the content of the web site, (b) Language Criteria, or what was found in Spanish, (c) Organization & Navigation, or what was easy to locate, and (d) Services Provided, or what services were available for Hispanics. This checklist was developed through the aid of professional literature regarding Hispanics and library web sites. The suggestions
given in the professional literature were by notable researchers in the topic of Hispanic accessibility to library web sites.

Reliability and Validity

The survey was determined to be reliable after conducting a pretest on two library web sites, The New York Public Library and The Free Library of Philadelphia, which were not part of the study sample. The results were assumed to be valid for the sample.
References

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS OF DATA

Responses

To gather data for this study of the evaluation of public library web sites for Hispanic accessibility, 20 public library web sites, one for each county, except Salem, in the state of New Jersey, were evaluated using a criteria checklist. These web sites were evaluated between the dates of February 19- March 7, 2005. The responses rate was 100%.

Statistical Analysis

The counts for each criterion were coded using a spreadsheet in Microsoft Excel (see Appendix C). All charts were created using Microsoft Excel. The criteria on the checklist were assigned numbers from Q1-Q27. Statistical analysis was limited to counts because of the small population.

Results

Research Criteria 1-7

Research criteria in Q1-Q7 consisted of Content Criteria: Q1 Is Dewey classification explained in Spanish? Q2 Are Hispanic/Latino and Spanish used interchangeably? Q3 Are there links to health issues, state and labor laws, regulations about minimum wage, mandated breaks, filing wage claims etc.? Q4 Are there links to Hispanic newspapers, magazines and web sites? Q5 Is there local information about the
area in Spanish? Q6 Is there one page where all Spanish-language resources are linked together? Q7 Are there any Spanish-language databases?

The criteria Q1 and Q2 were not found on any of the library web sites. Criteria Q3 was present on four library web sites. There were three web sites that had criterion Q4. Criteria Q5 and Q6 each had a one count. As shown in Figure 1, criteria Q7 had the largest count, with 18 library web sites.

Research Criteria 8-12

Figure 2 represents Language Criteria found on the web sites. They consist of: Q8 Is there information about the library and its branches in Spanish? Q9 Are the accent marks correct, does the Spanish make sense? Q10 Are there bilingual instructions? Q11 Is there instructions on how to get a library card, in Spanish? Q12 Are the policies present in Spanish?

The criteria Q8 and Q9 were only found on two web sites, while criteria Q10 and Q11 were found on three library web sites. Criterion Q12 was also present on only 2 web sites.

Research Criteria 13-15

The counts on Organization and Navigation are represented in Figure 3. These criteria are: Q13 Is there a language link located on the home page? Q14 Does the Spanish web site mirror the English web site? Q15 Is the language link located in a clearly visible area on the home page?

Criterion Q13 was found present on three library web sites, while criteria Q14 and Q15 were each only present on 1 web site.
Figure 1: Content Criteria

- Links to health issues and labor laws etc.
- Links to Hispanic newspapers, magazines and web sites
- Local information in Spanish
- Spanish-language resources linked on one page
- Spanish-language databases

Number of websites with these criteria

Q3
Q4
Q5
Q6
Q7
Figure 2: Language Criteria

- About the library and branches in Spanish
- Accent marks make sense
- Bilingual instructions
- How to get a library card in Spanish
- Policies in Spanish

Number of websites that have these criteria:

Q8: About the library and branches in Spanish
Q9: Accent marks make sense
Q10: Bilingual instructions
Q11: How to get a library card in Spanish
Q12: Policies in Spanish

n=20
Figure 3: Organization and Navigation  

Q13: Is the language link located in a clearly visible area on home page?
Q14: Does the Spanish web site mirror the English web site?
Q15: Is there a language link located on home page?

Number of websites that have these criteria:

- Q13: 3
- Q14: 1
- Q15: 1
Research Criteria 16-27

Figure 4 represents Services Provided criteria. These criteria consist of: Q16 Are there books- YA, Children’s and Adults Fic/NF in Spanish in the collection? Q17 Can new titles be reviewed in Spanish? Q18 Catalog available in Spanish? Q19 Is CNN en Espanol or an equivalent available? Q20 Is Google en Espanol or an equivalent available? Q21 Is Hotmail en Espanol or an equivalent available? Q22 Are there pathfinders in Spanish? Q23 Are there programs/classes in Spanish or interpreted? Q24 Is there the provision of a Latin collection, in Spanish? Q25 Is there Spanish-language reference support? Q26 Is there a suggestion box in Spanish? Q27 Are there broken links?

The criteria Q17, Q22 and Q26 were not found on any library web site examined. Criterion Q16 had the highest count in this category with four library web sites. Criteria Q18 and Q27 had the second highest count with three web sites each. The criteria Q19 and Q23 were each present on two web sites. Finally criteria Q20, Q21, Q24 and Q25 each only had a one count.

Summary

When examining the data collected, a few observations were made. In Content Criteria, Spanish-language databases were the most common criterion found on the 20 web sites examined. Out of 20 web sites, 18 had at least one Spanish-language database. Local information found in Spanish as well as Spanish-language resources linked on one page were the most uncommon, with 1 web site out of 20 each. When comparing the counts in the Language Criteria, bilingual instructions and how to get a library card in Spanish were the most common criteria found on the web sites with 3 out of 20 library
web sites. Policies in Spanish, accent marks that make sense and information about the library and its branches in Spanish were all tied for occurring the least, with 2 library web sites out of 20. The Organization and Navigation criteria showed that the language link located in a clearly visible area on the home page had the highest count, with 3 out of 20 library web sites. Meanwhile, the Spanish web site mirroring the English web site and the language link located on the home page were tied with the lower count of 1 out of 20 library web sites. Finally, the Services Provided criteria showed us that books in Spanish had the highest count with 4 out of 20 library web sites. Google en Espanol, Hotmail en Espanol, a Latin collection and Spanish-language reference had the least counts with 1 out of 20 library web sites. Library A and Library M were the two web sites which had the highest criteria counts overall. They will be further described in Chapter 5.
CHAPTER 5
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

This study answered the following questions: What are the criteria for evaluating library web sites for Hispanic accessibility? How accessible are the 20 New Jersey county libraries, or their equivalent, web sites to Hispanics?

There were 27 criteria that were separated into four different categories: Content Criteria (1-7), Language Criteria (8-12), Organization and Navigation (13-15) and finally Services Provided (16-27). Overall, the criteria were not frequently found on the public library web sites examined. Libraries A and M, however, had the highest frequency counts for criteria from the check list.

Interpretation of Results

Research Criteria 1-7

Library A displayed 4 out of the 7 criteria. The criteria present were links to health issues and to Hispanic magazines and web sites. There was also one page where all Spanish-language resources were linked together and a Spanish-language database.

Library M also displayed 4 out of 7 criteria. On Library M’s web site there were also links to health issues and Hispanic magazines and web sites. A Spanish-language database was also available. Additionally, local information about the area in Spanish was present.
Research Criteria 8-12

Libraries A and M both displayed every criterion in this grouping.

Research Criteria 13-15

Two out of 3 criteria were present for both Library A and Library M. On the web site for Library A there was a language link located on the home page which was located in a clearly visible area. Library M’s web site also displayed a language link located on the home page. The Spanish web site mirrored the English web site only for Library M.

Research Criteria 16-27

Finally, Library A had 5 of the criteria in this grouping. There were books for all ages in the Latin collection and programs in Spanish. There was also Spanish-language reference support. Unfortunately Q27, which represents broken links, works negatively for Library A. Library M only had one criterion, which was a catalog in Spanish.

Conclusions

The 20 public library web sites that were used in this study offered evidence that they were not easily accessible to Hispanic patrons. The exception was the availability of Spanish-language databases, which was found on 18 out of the 20 web sites. Generally, there was not enough information in Spanish about the library, their resources and services, local information and online links for Hispanic patrons. The information available was rarely organized in an easily accessible manner. Only once was there an instance where the information in Spanish mirrored the same information found on the English version of a web site. When the percentage of Hispanics for each of the 20 counties was examined, they ranged from making up 2.6% of the county population to making up 39.8% of the county population. Although it made sense that those library web
sites which were in counties with a low percentage of Hispanics would not meet most of the criteria, it was surprising that the library web sites which have a higher Hispanic population also did not meet most of the criteria.

Significance of Results

These results were important because they demonstrated the need for public library web sites to become more accessible to Hispanic patrons. There was a particular need for those libraries that were in counties with the highest percentage of Hispanics in their population to evaluate the accessibility of their web sites. If libraries are concerned with serving all members of the community then they need to evaluate their web sites as an outreach service for Hispanics.

Possible Uses of Results

Librarians and web creators for libraries can use the results of this research to help them develop a web site that meet all or most of the criteria offered for accessibility to Hispanics. They can also use the criteria checklist used in this study to evaluate their existing web sites.

Recommendations

It could be recommended to NJLA, ALA or REFORMA to further develop this checklist. It could also be recommended that the creators of web sites who appear to be meeting the needs of Hispanics could be interviewed to see what they are doing. Finally, the results of studies, such as this one, could be publicized to raise awareness of the need for web sites that are accessible to Hispanics.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


APPENDIX A

LIST OF LIBRARIES
APPENDIX A

Library Web Sites as of 03/07/05

Warren County Library
http://www.warrenlib.com

Somerset County Library
http://somerset.lib.nj.us

Jersey City Free Public Library
http://www.jclibrary.org

Bergen County Library
http://www.bccls.org

Paterson Public Library
http://www.palsplus.org

Atlantic County Library
http://www.atlanticlibrary.org

Morris County Library
http://www.gti.net/mocolib1/MCL.html

Hunterdon County Library
http://www.hunterdon.lib.nj.us

Mercer County Library
http://www.mcl.org

Burlington County Library
http://www.bcls.lib.nj.us

Cape May County Library
http://www.cape-may.county.lib.nj.us

Newark Public Library
http://www.npl.org

New Brunswick Free Public Library
http://www.lmxac.org/nbfpl

Sussex County Library
http://www.sussexcountylibrary.org
Elizabeth Public Library
http://www.njpublib.org/Elizabeth1.htm

Camden County Library
http://www.camden.lib.nj.us

Cumberland County Library
http://www.clueslibs.org

Ocean County Library
http://oceancounty.lib.nj.us

Monmouth County Library
http://www.monmouth.lib.nj.us

Gloucester County Library
http://www.gcls.org
APPENDIX B

CRITERIA CHECKLIST
APPENDIX B
Criteria Checklist

**Content Criteria**

☐ Q1 Dewey Classification explained in Spanish?

☐ Q2 Hispanic/Latino and Spanish used interchangeably?

☐ Q3 Links to health issues, state and labor laws, regulations about minimum wage, mandated breaks, filing wage claims etc.?

☐ Q4 Links to Hispanic newspapers, magazines and web sites?

☐ Q5 Local information about the area in Spanish?

☐ Q6 One page where all Spanish-language resources are linked together?

☐ Q7 Spanish-language databases?

**Language Criteria**

☐ Q8 About the library and branches in Spanish?

☐ Q9 Accent marks? Makes sense?

☐ Q10 Bilingual Instructions?

☐ Q11 How to get a library card in Spanish?

☐ Q12 Policies in Spanish?

**Organization and Navigation**

☐ Q13 Is there a language link located on the home page?

☐ Q14 Spanish web site mirrors English web site?

☐ Q15 Is the language link located in a clearly visible area on the home page?
Services Provided

☐ Q16 Books- YA, CH, Adults- Fic/NF in Spanish?

☐ Q17 Can new titles be reviewed in Spanish?

☐ Q18 Catalog in Spanish?

☐ Q19 CNN en Espanol or other?

☐ Q20 Google en Espanol or other?

☐ Q21 Hotmail en Espanol or other?

☐ Q22 Pathfinders in Spanish?

☐ Q23 Programs/classes in Spanish or interpreted?

☐ Q24 Provision of Latin collection? In Spanish?

☐ Q25 Spanish language reference support?

☐ Q26 Suggestion box?

☐ Q27 Broken links?
APPENDIX C

SPREADSHEET DATA
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