

Running head: TLC.EDU USAGE

How is TLC.edu being used?

Constance Wohlford

Trinity Lutheran College

Question: How is TLC.edu being used?

Abstract

This research studies the website TLC.edu. This site is studied in an effort to better understand college websites and how they are best used to recruit potential students. Fourteen of the college's pages are coded against an ideal college website. Half the coded pages are from the most viewed pages and the other half are the least viewed. The results show that the most viewed sites scored better and closer to the ideal. This will lead to future studies of peer college websites.

The Trinity Lutheran College Communications Department asked the researcher early in the quarter to review peer institution websites. This was requested in order to gain insights about improvements that can be made to their own webpage, specifically involving recruiting potential students. In order to review peer webpages, a system of qualitative and quantitative measures needs to be developed. They can then be tested against Trinity Lutheran's college website to measure efficacy. Eventually they can be used on peer pages.

College websites, and what college bound prospects expect of them, have been studied before. In 2001 a team from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill studied 55 students in North Carolina and Michigan. They found that these high school students were looking for information that was mean for them. "Participants were generally unaware of other constituencies of a university (alumni, faculty, donors, etc.) and therefor viewed any information not directly specific to them as superfluous (Pooch & Lefond, 2001, p. 19)." For the pages that did relate to them, they wanted less clicks to access information. Advanced users would simply use the school's search function to find their requests. Regarding content, it was better when the pages held enough pertinent information that the users did not have to click too many times to access it. Pooch and Lefond found that "a general mix of 70 percent text and 30 percent graphics was optimal" (p. 19). The images and graphics that were included "should help the prospective student answer the question, 'Will I fit in?'" (p. 19).

The findings of Pooch and Lefond are all fantastic measures for which to score a college webpage by. Pages that are viewed more often should score high on these scales against the ideal webpage described above, while lesser viewed pages should score low on these scales.

Method

Pages from TLC.edu will be measured on the following variables: Number of clicks it took to get there from the index page. Scale % of the page that is text verses the percent that is image. Category (Communication, Access to tools, Promotion and marketing, etc.). Likert scale of “Will I fit in?” Was there an opportunity for dialogic loop? Point values will be assigned to these variables so that pages can be compared to one another. These will be recorded on a form designed by the researchers and modeled after those of Dr. David Schultz (Qualitative, 2013, & Coding, 2013).

The sample will be the top seven viewed sites and seven of the least viewed sites from the six month period of February 1, 2013 through July 31, 2013. This period was chosen because it best reflects the months that potential students view and the TLC.edu website and apply for the school. The list of page views will come from Google Analytics records.

The top seven sites will be chosen in order from most to seventh most. The bottom sites are all similarly accessed so the same method cannot be used. Instead pages with five or fewer views during the period will be eligible to be included in the seven. Some URLs will be excluded. These will include: SQL injection searches or translations, pages that are duplicates of other pages higher in the results (for instance tlc.edu/psychology/index.htm will be excluded since tlc.edu/psychology/ has more than five views and the links point to the same place.) Pages that were never meant for public view (test pages), and pages that no longer exist. The pages that will be compared will come from this pool using random sampling.

Results

There are 79 pages that were viewed five times or less, a number was chosen between 1 and 79 and that became the first record. Every 11th record was chosen until a sample of 7 was

obtained. The top 7 pages and the bottom 7 pages were scored in such a way that the further the page was from an ideal page for student recruitment, the higher the score. The average score on the top seven pages was 23.14, while the average score on the bottom 7 pages was 32.39.

Discussion

According to the scoring system, the most viewed pages on the TLC.edu website were more similar to an ideal college website than the least viewed pages. These findings support the hypotheses, and the results of Poock and Lefond. The most accessed pages are more like the ideal college website they describe. At this time, these results cannot be generalized outside of TLC.edu, but hopefully in the near future they will be able to be. The scoring system can at least be taken to other websites for comparison and contrast.

There are confounds to the data in this study. One is that the raw data from Google Analytics was not very clean. Pages with more than one URL were listed twice. Also, though efforts have been made to remove page counts that came from inside Trinity Lutheran College, this is hard to do for past data. Another confound that will need to be addressed before using the coding system on external websites is the weighting of elements. The current system puts perhaps too much emphasis on the ideal of 30 percent images and 70 percent text on the page.

The next step for this research is adjusting and retesting the coding system on another set of TLC.edu data. Then, if it is good, it can be used in future studies on peer institution websites and their pages. TLC.edu will be proven to be the best small non-profit Christian college website around.

References

- Pook, M. C., & Lefond, D. (2001). How college-bound prospects perceive university Web sites: findings, implications, and turning browser into applicants. *C&U Journal*, 77(1), 7.
- Schultz, D. (2013). Coding form. [Class handout]. Communications Department, Trinity Lutheran College, Everett, WA.
- Schultz, D. (2013). Qualitative comparison in class exercise. [Class handout]. Communications Department, Trinity Lutheran College, Everett, WA.