Re-evaluate Your Library Website Using Card Sorts

Background

Our library website's current organizational structure is over 10 years old. Navigation is loosely arranged into tools, resources, collections and services. We seek to update this classification system to better serve our diverse patron groups:
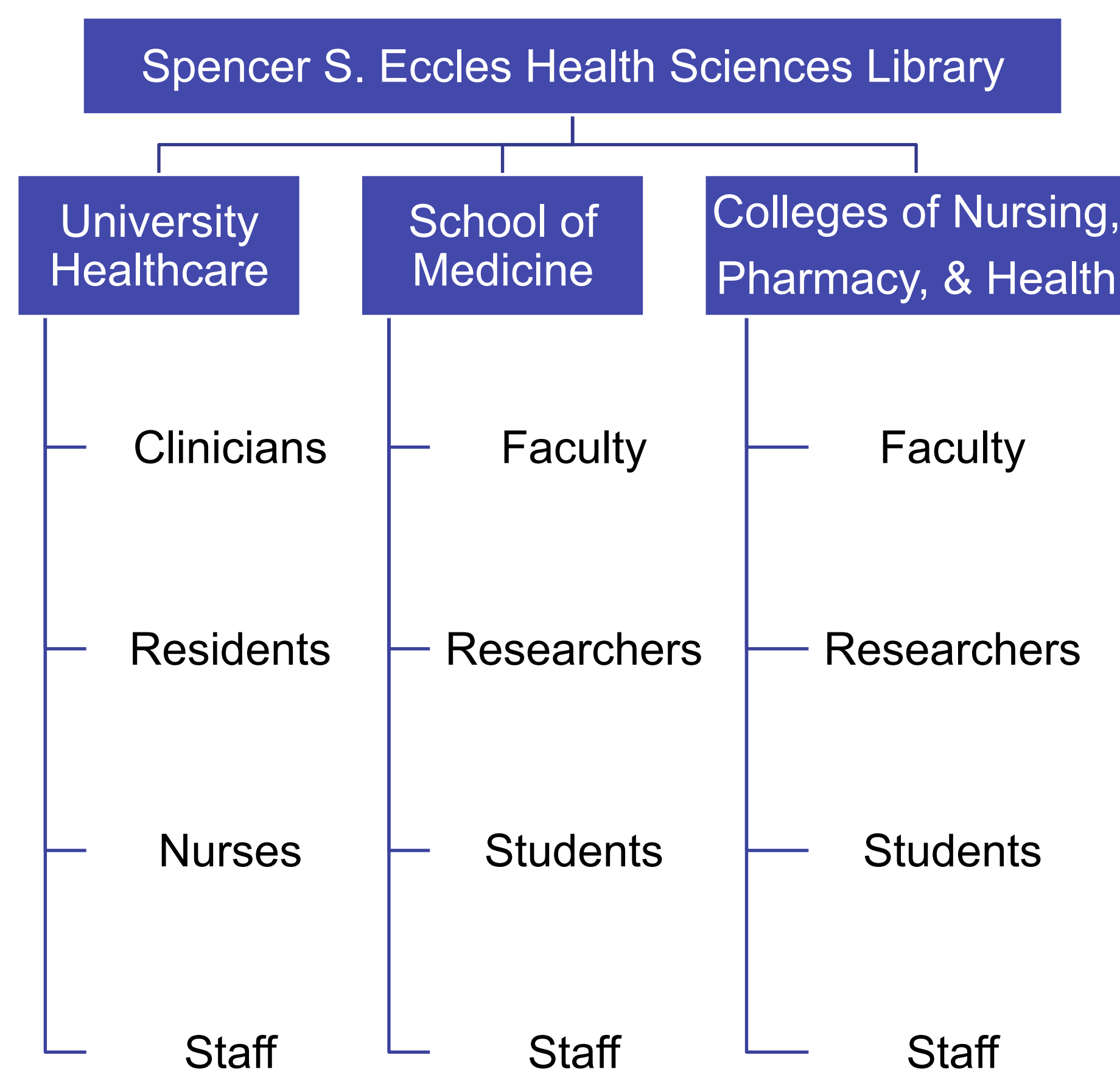
Figure 1. The first row represents the library, the second row represents the groups that the library serves, and the bottom section represents the various roles that our patrons might hold within each group.

Objective

Re-evaluate our library website's structure and organization to make navigation more intuitive and in line with today's user expectations.

Method

Card sorting is a low-tech method to learn how website visitors categorize the information offered. This involves asking volunteers to sort a set of 88 cards into groups. The cards are each labeled with one link from our website.

Step 1: Open sort
Participants were asked to sort the cards into groups, and then name those groups. Analysis was was done by finding similarities between the groups chosen by each participant and attempting to find 5 categories that best matched the results of each sort.
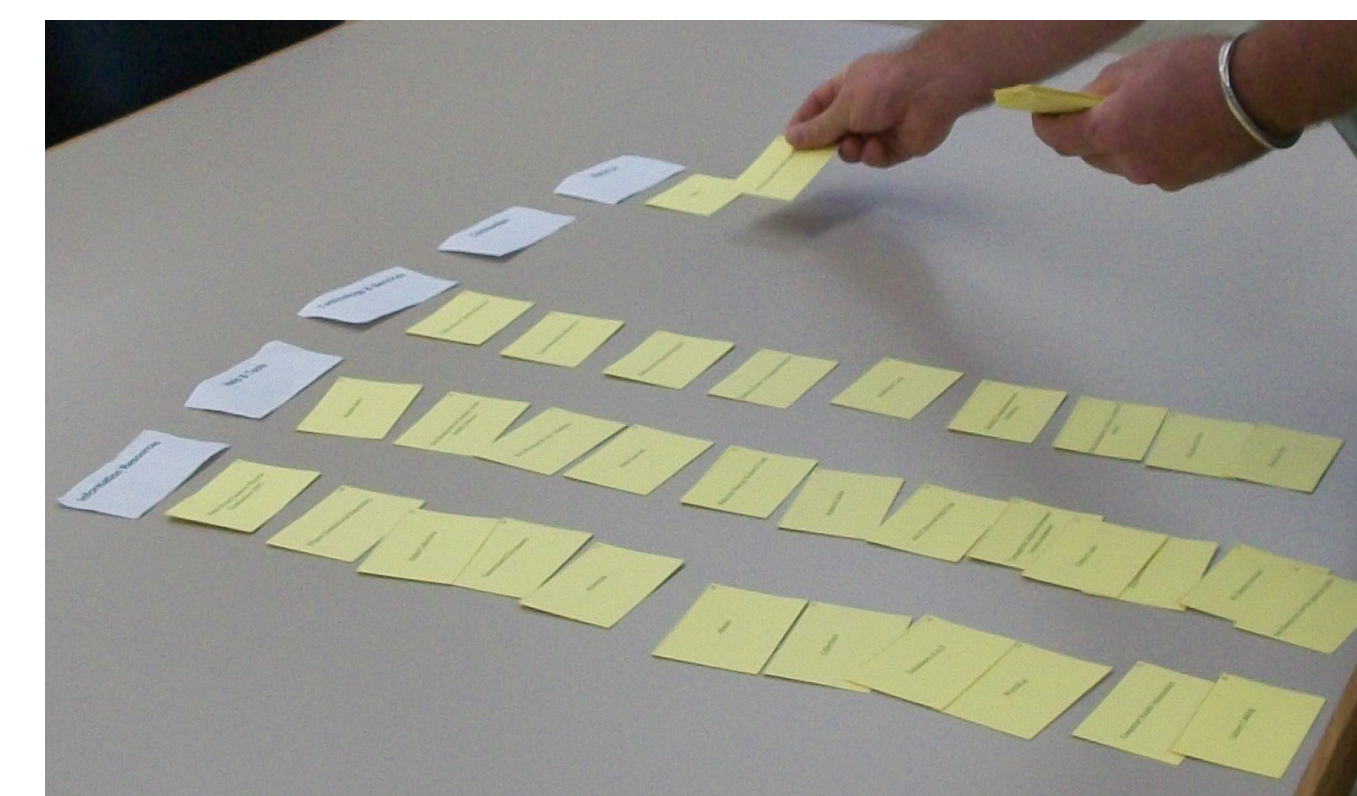
Step 2: Closed sort
A second group of volunteers sort the same 88 cards into groups according to these categories (see Figure 2) to determine the degree to which the participants agree on which cards belong under each category.

Figure 2

Recruiting participants:
To find participants that would cover the full range of perspectives present on our campus, we sought at least one faculty member and student from each school/college, and at least two clinicians and two researchers (from any group), for a total of 12. After many attempts, we succeeded in recruiting nine volunteers for each sort.
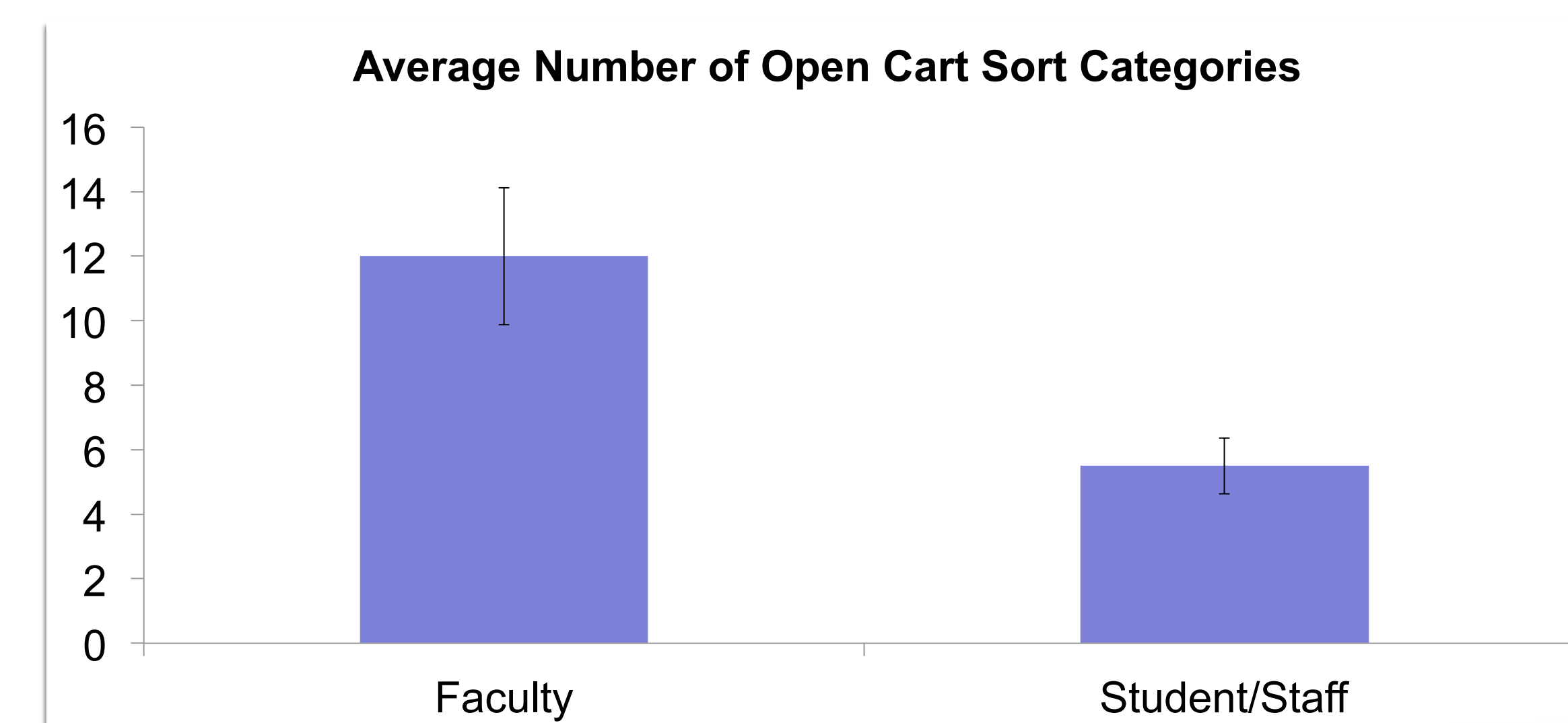
Results

Open Sort
Number of categories based on role

Average Number of Open Cart Sort Categories

Figure 3

Resulting Categories:
- Information Resources
- Help & Tools
- Technology & Services
- Communities
- About Us

Results (cont'd)

Closed Sort
Categories in general agreement with the open sort analysis:
- Information Resources
- Help & Tools
- Technology & Services
- About Us

Categories not matching with open sort analysis:
- Communities

Conclusions

1. **Patron groups differ notably on number of categories used** (see Figure 3).

2. **Words mean different things to different people.** "Communities," for example, means web-based bulletin boards, community outreach, and groups of people pursuing similar goals. We replaced **Communities** with **Key Resources For…**

3. **Students and Faculty in a Health Sciences setting have no extra time to volunteer help.** Very few busy clinicians, faculty, and students can spare 15 minutes to complete a closed sort, much less 20-25 minutes for an open sort. Many of our volunteers are ardent supporters of the library, and may be heavier users of the website than the majority of our patrons. For future website re-evaluations we might offer incentives to participate or choose a less time-intensive method.

4. **A great learning experience** One-on-one contact with patrons provided helpful feedback, gave us a way to focus our thoughts and helped clarify a way to move forward with website reorganization.

Abby Adamczyk, Research Librarian; Amy Honisett, Education Librarian; R. Todd Vandenbark, Web Services Librarian

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