Literature Review:
Website usability for archives/special collections
General observations

- Much more in academic library literature than archives literature

- There is some research in archives literature about different types of users, and user interactions with finding aids

- I recommend the Journal of Web Librarianship if you have access
Common themes in the literature

- Our users:
  - Are influenced by Google & Wikipedia
  - Want quick and easy access to search
  - Think the OPAC holds everything & search box searches everything
  - Would rather do search and see what they find than read a lot about the search ahead of time
  - Have trouble with our terms & categories
  - Often don’t even know where to start
  - Don’t like pages overloaded with text
Common themes, continued

- We should:
  - Create permanent usability teams
  - Perform user testing iteratively
  - Provide easy-to-find research help
  - Provide clear and consistent navigation
  - Provide clear connections between related resources
“In summary, it is necessary to find a balance between the specialness of our materials, and the words we use to describe them, and common Web standards that should be employed to create Web sites useful to all our patrons.”

- Suggests annotations for links, library FAQs, research guides
- Links to Kupersmith’s “library terms that users understand” [http://www.jkup.net/terms.html](http://www.jkup.net/terms.html)
- Don’t have to avoid all specialized terminology, but - Be as unambiguous and helpful as possible
Archival structure and hierarchy are not self-evident

Homepage should convey identity, mission, where to start, how to search – but not be cluttered

Stevenson asked some non-task-based questions:
- How would you describe what this site is for?
- What might you find in a search?
- Who is this site aimed at?

You can not please everyone all the time

Some learning curve is acceptable

User Quotation: “I would expect this – maybe an example – just one picture of the sort of thing you are going to find. It helps you to imagine what the collection is.”
Some relevant general academic library articles

  - Perhaps we could develop such a list for Archives web sites?
- “An Exploration into the Practices of Library Web Usability in ARL Academic Libraries” Chen, Germain and Yang in JASIST 60(5) 2009
  - Developing Web Usability PSGs (Policies/Standards/Guidelines)
  - Focus on novice users to build baseline interface upon which future enhancements can be built
  - Be agile in development, commit to brainstorming and experimentation