# Catholic Portal Usability Study – Villanova University

A Catholic Portal Usability Study was conducted at Villanova University in September, 2011.

## Study Questions

We asked participants to complete eight tasks, adapted from the original Notre Dame tasks. We removed the “text mining” task since we had difficulty finding an example record (perhaps a “text mining available” facet would be useful). We added an open-ended question at the end of the test to encourage user experimentation and comment. We also ended up modifying one question midway through the test process: #2 originally explicitly instructed the user to “create an account” but we decided to remove it and see if users would figure out that they needed an account in order to proceed (indeed, users stopped stumbling over this task once we changed the question).

1. Identify the library or archive holding the papers of Dorothy Day.
2. Find a record whose author is J. R. R. Tolkien. Add the Tolkien record to your favorites, tagging it as “jrrtolkien.”
3. Locate resources, including primary resources, on the Augustinian Order.
4. Find a set of records on the topic of “conscientious objectors.” Choose one from the retrieved set and email it to yourself for future reference.
5. Locate materials on the topic of 17th century sermons.  Which library seems to have the most records on this topic?
6. Who owns “Our Sunday Visitor Records”? What telephone number would you call in order to schedule a time to visit the collection?
7. What is the earliest edition of St. Augustine’s Confessions that you can find in the Portal?
8. Perform a search on a subject you are currently researching.  Are you able to find any useful materials?

## Facilitators and Participants

Four Villanova staff members were involved in the study: one to schedule the subjects, one to facilitate the test sessions, and two to record (different recorders were available on different dates). Six subjects were tested, all graduate students in the theology program but representing a surprisingly diverse range of backgrounds and demographics.

## ­­­­­Complications

Unfortunately, there currently seems to be a bug in the Portal which prevents lightbox pop-ups from functioning properly. This made testing difficult, since several tasks rely on pop-ups. As a workaround, we disabled Javascript in the web browser used for testing – this ensured that users did not encounter fatal errors, but it also meant that certain features of the portal (autocomplete, advanced search) were non-functional for most of our test sessions, possibly skewing results.

Another minor technical difficulty had to do with recording the sessions. We used the open source CamStudio package to capture the sessions, and after completing the tests, we discovered that there were some audio synchronization problems (audio got ahead of video). This did not prevent the recordings from being useful for reference, but if others use CamStudio, it may be worth doing more experimentation to find the ideal audio/video settings to obtain the best output.

## Findings

Our findings are broken down into three sections: the top five user issues (problems that showed up in the most sessions), the top five facilitator issues (problems that facilitators voted as being most important), and then all remaining issues that were noted (which may or may not be important – just being shared for everyone’s reference).

### Top Five User Issues

1. Pop-up lightboxes do not function correctly (6)
2. Facets are easy to overlook, and the most useful ones are not at the top of the list (6)
3. If you create an account in the middle of performing an action (like “add to favorites”), the software loses track of what you were originally doing once you finish the account creation process (5)
4. Doing searches for “St.” vs. “Saint” yield very different results (the more archaic “s” abbreviation may also factor in here); it might be worth adding a synonym to the system (3)
5. The email dialog box is always empty; it might be useful to pre-populate the current user’s email address if they are logged in, and a default “From:” address might also be helpful (i.e. no-reply@catholicresearch.net). (2)

### Top Five Facilitator Issues

1. The “Subject” search is not always helpful if users are not familiar with Library of Congress Subject Headings; we should set better expectations or offer authority-based suggestions
2. The “suggested topics” box seems to mislead people (it narrows the search, but some seem to expect it to broaden the search); maybe it should be turned off and the topic facet added to the usual facet list on the left.
3. In the author module, the “related subjects” box on the left is somewhat confusing; perhaps this should be replaced with the standard facet box for consistency with other areas of the interface
4. The “Create Account” link is hard to find, and the “Login” link should be on the right rather than the left (by general convention)
5. Autocomplete suggestions seem to distract and mislead the user

### All Remaining Issues

1. The default font size is too small, and using red text in the text boxes makes it hard to read
2. The “suggested authors” box may be too big and distracting
3. The “format” option on the advanced search screen is confusing
4. The autosuggestion box is too small
5. There are almost never book covers on display; should we use format-related icons instead or disable them entirely?
6. Some of the formats displayed at the bottom of record entries (i.e. “Archival material”) do not have corresponding icons.
7. The graphic for “CRRA: The Movie” on the front page is not clickable; it should be linked. As well, the graphic and link for “CRRA: The Movie” should be made more prominent on the front page so it’s more quickly and easily seen by users.
8. Users sometimes get lost when they click on finding aids at other institutions and don’t realize they have left the portal; should we add a pop-up or frame to indicate what has happened? Is the forced opening in a new window problematic?
9. The login screen should include a paragraph explaining that CRRA has its own accounts – users sometimes try their own institutional logins
10. One user requested subject-specific research guides as part of the portal to help provide search tips
11. The portal uses “Topic” in some places and “Subject” in others; perhaps one term should be used everywhere for better consistency
12. The “Call Number” facet is confusing; should it be relabeled as “Classification” or “LC Classification”?
13. More prominent contact information (perhaps associated with the “Location:” field) would be helpful.
14. The facet bar is very long. Would it be easier to use if the contents of each facet were collapsible?
15. It would be useful to geocode items based on home institution and allow current user’s location to impact relevancy; perhaps plot on a map.
16. The gradient background used on the advanced search screen is hard on the eyes
17. Some date sorting fails because of bad data in the index (for example, search for “confessions” and sort by “Date Ascending” – many items show at the top of the list because of blank dates)
18. User request: digitize out-of-copyright theses.