MARKET RESEARCH – Report of 20 colleges websites

Executive Summary

This report is the summation of a market research that explored the state of affairs of college websites in California. The purpose of this market research was to explore what kind of information that college students expected to find on college websites' homepages, and what kind of information most college websites' homepages did contain.

Twenty college websites were selected. The list of websites reviewed consisted of 10 private and 10 public colleges. Among the 10 public colleges, five of them were from the UC system while the other 5 belonged to CSU system. The basic features on the college website homepage were reviewed, using a 28-item checklist. The items were grouped into five major *categories namely, General Information, Academic Programs, Student Services, Financial Aid, and Site Structure*. Data was collected and analyzed. This report presented and summarized these findings.

The main conclusions of this market research are as follows:

1. Most sites did not contain many elements of the 28-item checklist. Only 5 sites had more than 50% of the elements available. The highest percentages of elements found in two sites were 75% and 63% representatively.

2. *General Information* had the highest percentage of elements (62%). The other categories in ascending order of percentage of elements found were *Academic*

Programs (43%), *Student Services* (40%), *Site Structure* (35%), and *Financial Aid* (18%).

3. There seems to be a slight difference between private and public college websites. Public college websites outnumbered private college websites in all items present within each category.

Overview

The purpose of this study was to review the major information on college websites' homepage. It was assessed from the users' (college students) perspective. Twenty college websites in California were selected from most search engines. The list of websites was composed of 10 private and 10 public colleges. Among the 10 public colleges, 5 of them are from the UC system while the other 5 belonged to CSU system.

These websites were reviewed for the presence of 28 elements stated on the checklist *(Appendix A)*. The elements were categorized into 5 major groups namely, *General Information, Academic Programs, Student Services, Financial Aid, Site Structure. General Information* consisted of 7 elements such as admission, application, academic calendar, news and info, campus map, contact info, and directory. Likewise, *academic programs* had 4 items such as academic programs, e-curriculum, schedule and catalog. Similarly, *Student Services* had 9 elements such as prospectus students, current students, housing, library, and disability resources. Job, federal fund, tuition and fees, and scholarship were the 4 elements of *Financial Aid*. Finally, *Site Structure* was composed of 4 items, namely help/technical support, quick search, FAQ, and site map/index.

Individual websites were reviewed and "1" was marked for the element was present and "0" for it was absent. Then it was summed up. Percentage and averages were used to

analyze the information. Moreover, the information on public colleges websites' homepage was compared to the private colleges'.

Results

The number of elements present in each college website was summed up to get the percentage for that individual site. None of these sites contained all the elements. Among all the websites, only 5 sites had a percentage of more than 50% *(Chart 1)*. That was, only 5 sites contained more than 12 elements on the homepages. These were site numbers 12, 13, 14, 18, & 19. *(Appendix B)*. Two of these sites had the highest percentage of elements in their sites (75% & 63% representatively).

<u>**Chart 1**</u>

Site Distribution

Percentage of elements on each site
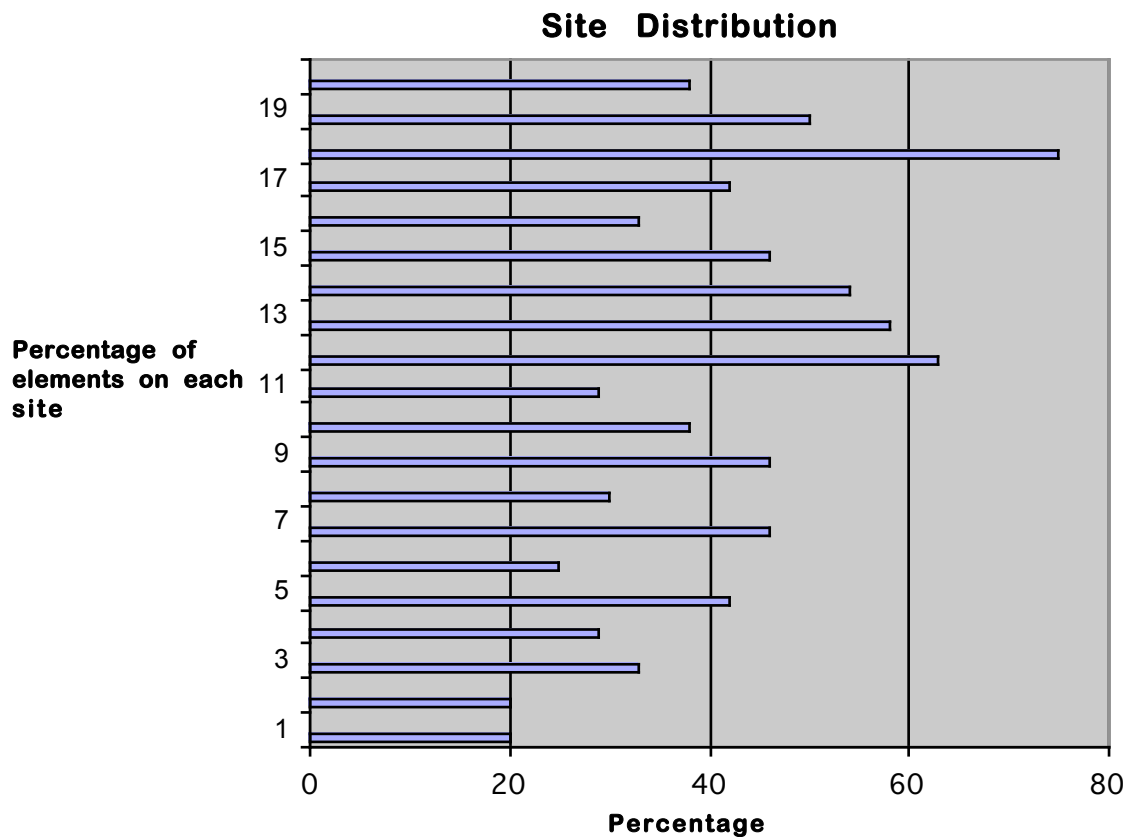
Percentage

This reflected that most sites did not contain the most important information, which college students needed on the homepages. To have a closer look at the major differences among these sites, percentages of each category and each element within that category were calculated. Let us look at the percentage differences between the 5 categories *(Chart 2)*.

Chart 2

Average Percentage of Elements on Each Category
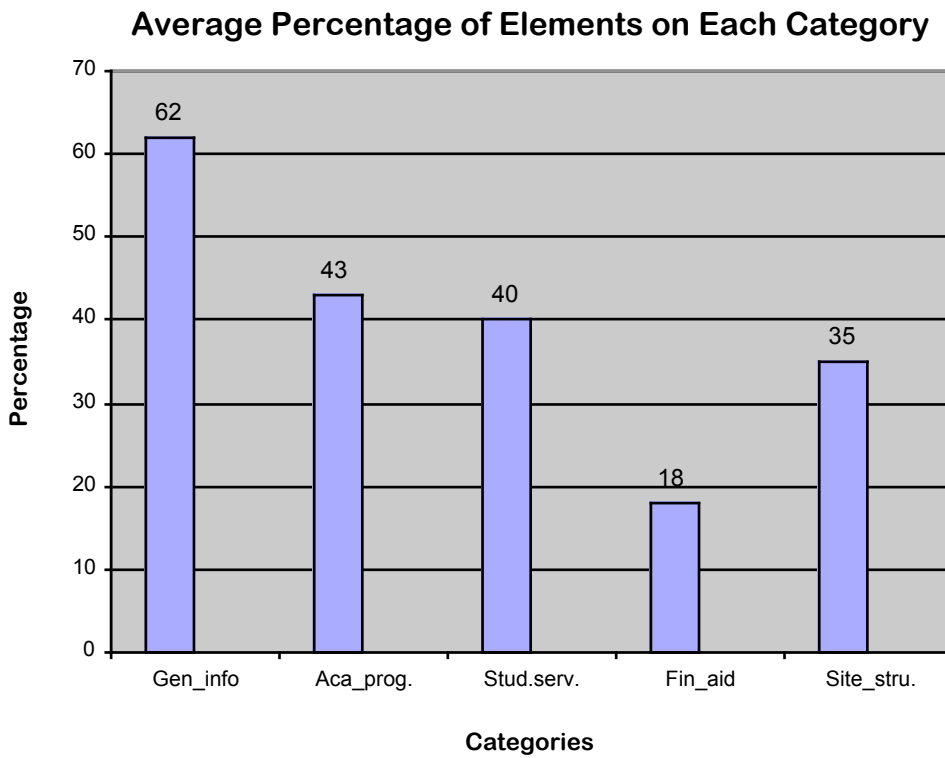
The first Category, *General Information*, had the highest average percentage (62%) of elements. This was followed by the *Academic Programs* (43%), *Student Services* (40%), *Site Structure* (35%), and *Financial Aid* (18%). This showed that most college websites provided general information to students, but rarely of them provided financial aid information to them.

Now we can look within each category and to know how each element was used. *General Information* had 7 elements and 4 of these elements were present in more than 50% of the sites *(Chart 3)*. 95% of sites contained information about contact info. 90% of sites had news and info, and 85% of sites had admission info. However, just half of the sites (55%) had directory.

Chart 3

Percentage of Sites Contain an Element

**7 Elements of the Gerneral Informaion Item**
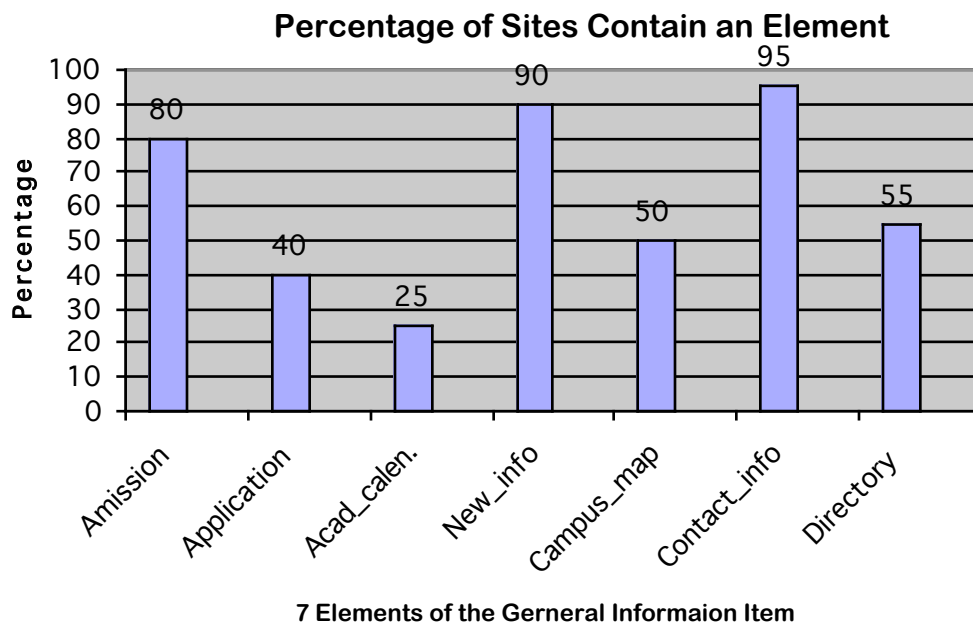
Academic Program had 4 elements. Among the 4 elements, only academic programs item (100%) had a high representation on those 20 sites. The other elements only had a low percentage. The schedule item had 35% and catalog had 25%. Surprisingly, e-curriculum/distance learning info was just present on 10% of the sites *(Chart 4)*.

Chart 4

**Percentage of Sites contain an Element in the
Academic Program Category**

4 elements in the Academic Program Catagory
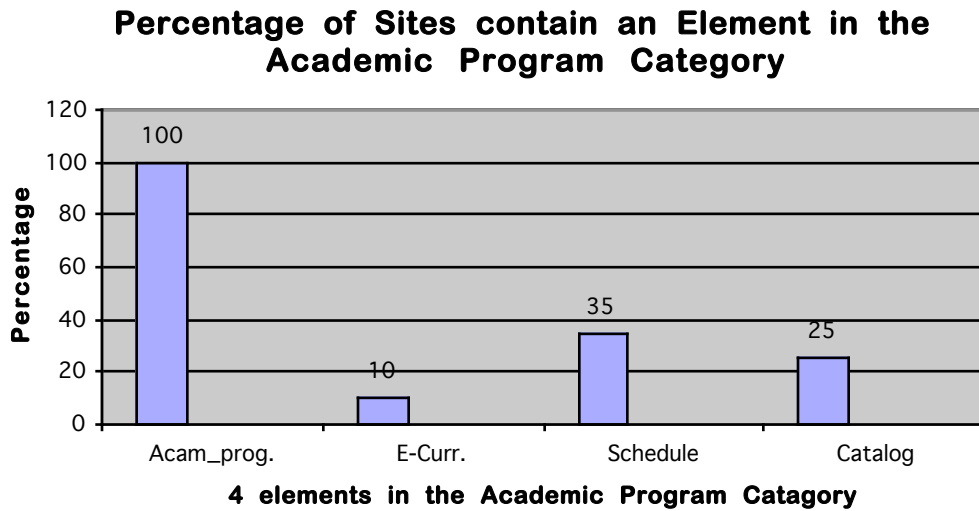
In the *Student Services* category 85% of sites had info for current students and 70% for prospectus students. However, only 15% of sites contained info for international students. Among other items, 70% of sites had information for library and 50% for campus life. The rest of the items had a low percentage on sites. 35% websites had athletic info and only 20% of sites had disability resources for students. Among all, 0% website had transportation and parking info *(Chart 5)*.
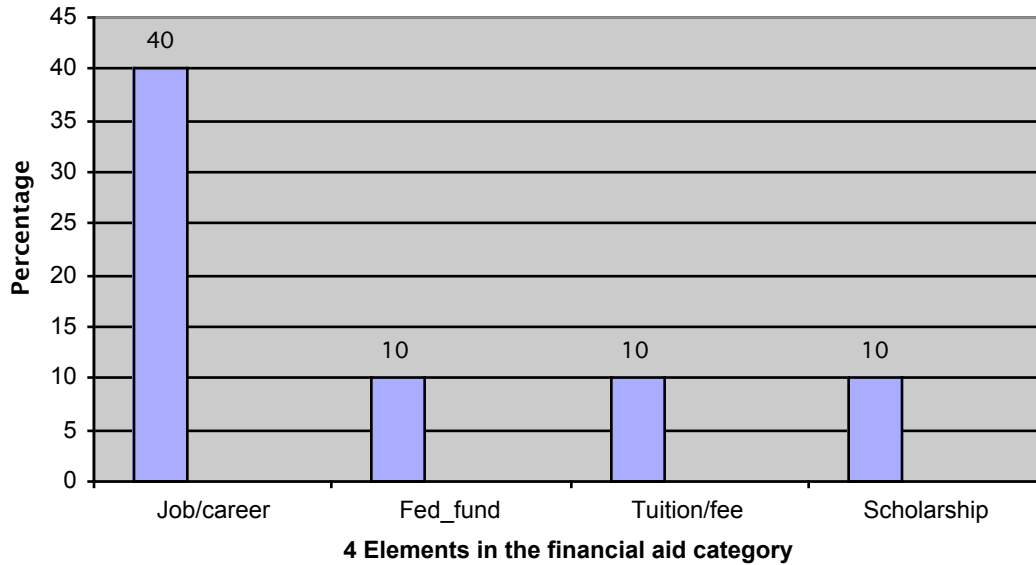
Chart 5
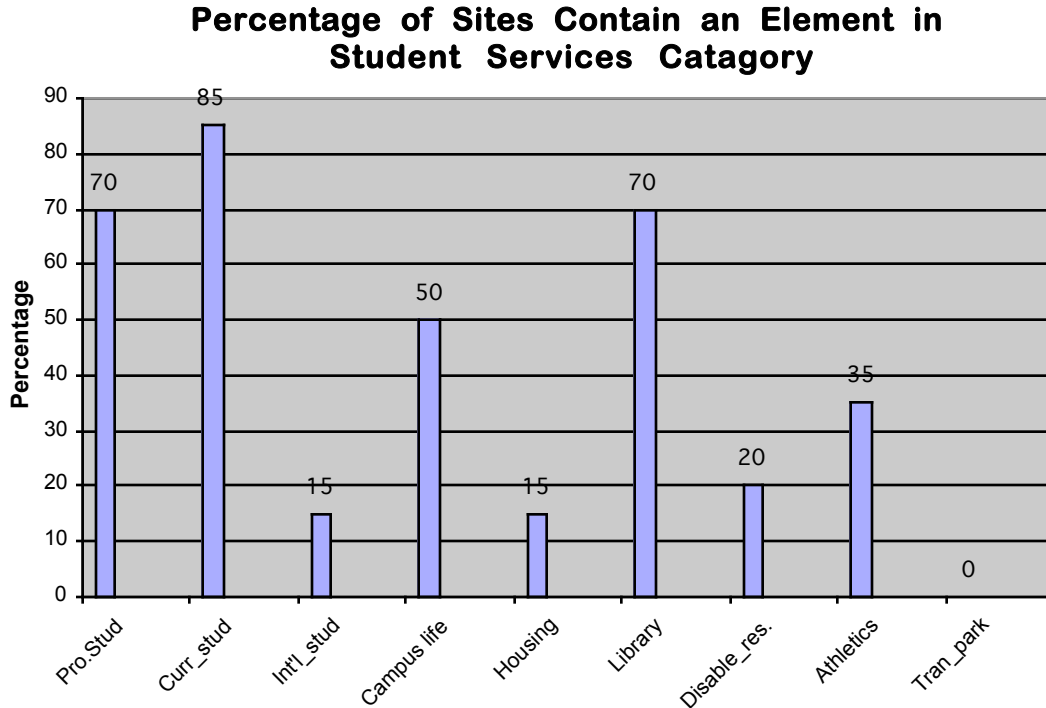
Percentage of Sites Contain an Element in Student Services Catagory

None of an element out of 4 in the *Financial Aid* category was present on more than 50% of sites. Job/career section was present 40% of sites. Only 10% of sites had information about federal fund, tuition and fees, and scholarship *(Chart 6)*.

Chart 6

Percentage of Sites Contain an Element in the Financial Aid Category

Finally, the *Site Structure* category had 4 elements. Only site map/index was present on more than 50% of sites (55%). The other items had less than 20% present on all sites. They were quick search (13%), help/technical support (10%), and FAQ (10%)(*Chart 7*).

Chart 7

Percentage of Sites Contain an Element in the Site Structure Category
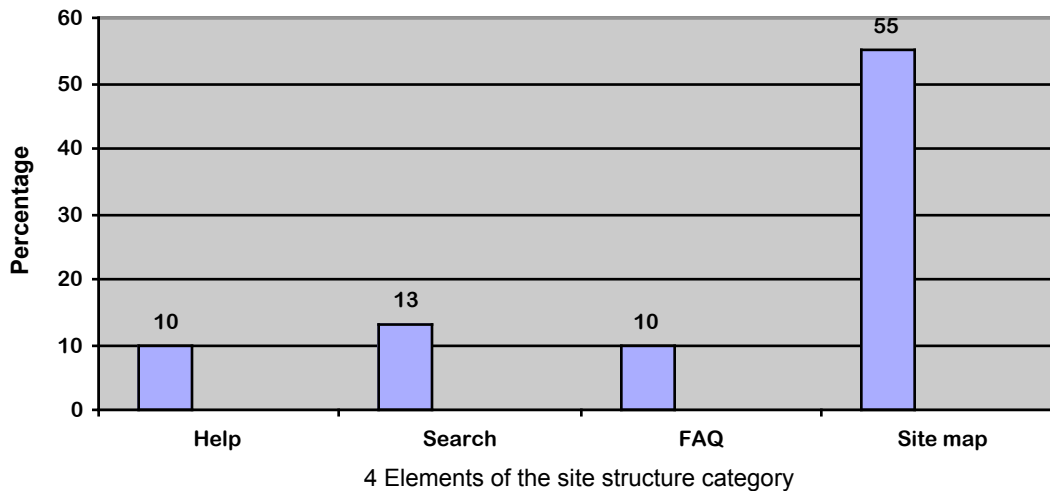
Except the above analyses, public college and private college websites were compared Elements within *General Information, Academic Programs, Student Services, Financial Aid, and Site Structure* were cited significantly more in public college than private college websites' homepages. In the Category of General Information, the average number of elements presented in the public college websites was 4.2 (Out of 7), which was higher than the average (4.5) of the private college websites. Similarly, there was slight difference in averages between public and private college websites in all other categories. The most significant difference happened in the *Student Services* category. Private college sites had 2.6 items (out of 9) in this category, but public college sites had 4.7 items *(Chart 8)*.

Chart 8

Differences in Elements Distribution
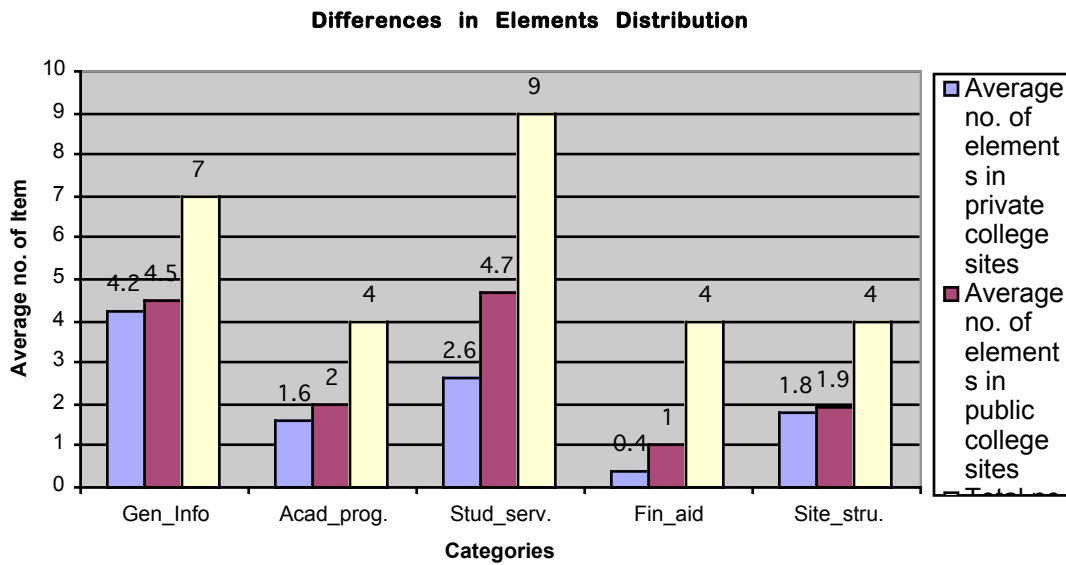
Summary

In summary, most college websites' homepages do not have all the elements that would be expected by college students. However, when a site had more number of

elements cited, it would be in the area of *General Information*. *Financial Aid* info was most likely absent in many sites. And there was a slightly difference between public and private college websites in the presence of elements in each category. Public college websites outnumbered private college sites in all elements within each category. Future research should address a couple of questions. The needs of audiences should be addressed when developed college websites. All essential elements should be present on homepage so that the information would be easily assessable to the users.

Appendix A

Essential features of a college website

General Information	1. Admission 2. Application 3. Academic calendar 4. News and info 5. Campus map/direction 6. Contact info 7. Directory
Academic programs	1. Academic programs 2. E-curriculum/distance learning 3. Schedule 4. Catalog
Student services	1. Prospectus students 2. Current students 3. International students 4. Campus life 5. Housing 6. Library 7. Disability resources 8. Athletics 9. Transportation and parking
Financial aid	1. Job/career 2. Federal fund 3. Tuition and fees 4. Scholarship
Site structure	1. Help/technical support 2. Quick search 3. FAQ 4. Site map/index

Appendix B

List of college websites

Websites	Percentage of total elements
1. http://www.alu.edu/	20%
2. http://www.antiochla.edu/	20%
3. http://www.scu.edu/	33%
4. http://www.stanford.edu/	29%
5. http://www.mills.edu/	42%
6. http://www.usfca.edu/	25%
7. http://www.ulaverne.edu/	46%
8. http://www.sandiego.edu/	30%
9. http://www.usc.edu/	46%
10. http://www.chapman.edu/	38%
11. http://www.sjsu.edu/	29%
12. http://www.csuhayward.edu/	63%
13. http://www.csufresno.edu/	58%
14. http://www.sfsu.edu/	54%
15. http://csumb.edu/	46%
16. http://www.ucsf.edu/	33%
17. http://www.ucsd.edu/	42%
18. http://www.ucla.edu/	75%
19. http://www.ucsc.edu/public/	50%
20. http://www.ucdavis.edu/	38%