Dashew Center for International Students & Scholars
Information Assessment for Communication Improvement

Introduction

In partnership with the Dashew Center for International Students & Scholars (DCISS), the Student Affairs Information and Research Office (SAIRO) at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) conducted an assessment study to learn more about how international students interact with the Dashew Center's website. The Dashew Center is investigating whether their website serves its constituents effectively. This assessment is designed to advise the Center on methods of improving their communication and providing better access to resources for their students.

The project sought to answer the following questions:
1. What information do constituents critically need from the Dashew Center?
    a. What currently available information is most or least useful to constituents?
    b. What information do constituents report needing that is not available to them?
2. What critical information can and cannot be accessed easily?
3. How do constituents currently access critical information?
4. How would they like to access information in the future?

Methods

The findings listed in this report draw from three main sources of data: an online survey, in-person interviews, and Google Analytics. More information on each of these measures is below.

Survey

Created in collaboration with DCISS, a 10-minute online survey was administered in Spring 2019 to UCLA undergraduate and graduate international students. At the time of analysis, 435 responses had been collected. The survey's topics included the frequency of website visits, types of resources students searched, difficulties encountered when navigating the website, and students' satisfaction with their overall website experience.

Interviews and think-aloud procedure

We administered in-person interviews to 9 participants in order to develop a closer understanding of the constituent experience. Within these interviews, participants were asked to comment on the helpfulness of the website throughout their college admissions process; they were also questioned on their familiarity with Dashew events, and any difficulties they experienced while accessing the website. Constituents were then presented with a think-aloud procedure, in which they would use the website while verbally reporting their train of thought when searching for specific pages. This procedure allowed us to develop a deeper understanding of how and why constituents navigate the Dashew website in the specific way that they do.

The think-aloud portion of the interview was particularly illustrative, because it allowed us to contextualize constituents' accounts of their experiences as presented by the survey responses. By tracking the participants' train of thought, we were able to pinpoint specific navigational challenges on the website.

Google Analytics

To gain a deeper understanding of constituents' use of the Dashew Center website, our team employed Google Analytics, a web analytics service that reports website traffic and user activity, such as session duration, bounce rate, and source of users. The data that we analyzed spanned from September 2018 (the earliest point at which

UCLA SAIRO
PROMOTING THE USE OF DATA TO ENHANCE THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE

Student Affairs Information and Research Office
1105 Murphy Hall (310) 206-8470
Los Angeles, CA 90095 sairo@saonet.ucla.edu
Box 951324, Mail Code 132401 www.sairo.ucla.edu

the site's data is recorded) to May 2019 inclusive. Our team analyzed the amount of time that users spent on the website and the peaks of website usage.

Findings

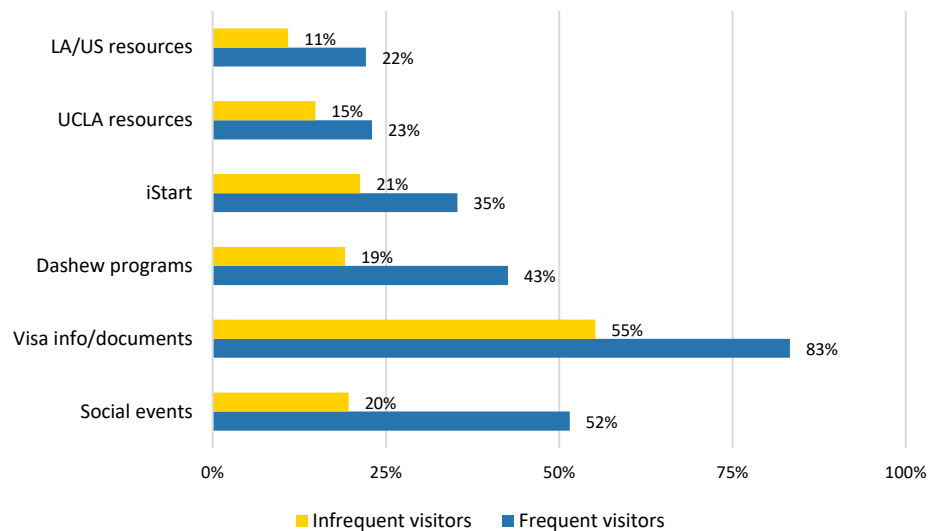## Information needed by student constituents

Information accessed

Web analytics indicate that constituents access the Dashew website the most during the month of September and the month of April through the first week of May. In 2018, November 7 also saw a one-day spike in traffic. Fifty-three percent of site users spent under 10 seconds on the website. The average site visit, however, lasts 3:16, suggesting that many constituents stay on the website to research information. The bounce rate—the rate at which users leave the website after viewing one page—is 41.8%, which implies that users were either able to find the information that they needed or came upon the page by accident.

Aside from the homepage, the most visited pages on the site were as follows, based on Analytics data: Documents & Forms, F-1 Students (Newly Admitted), F-1 Students (Currently Enrolled), and the Contact page. Figure 1 below, which is based on survey responses, illustrates the responses of frequent and infrequent users[1] in terms of how often they report seeking various types of information on the Dashew website.

Figure 1. Information seeking
% of students reporting they "sometimes" or "often" look for the following information

	Infrequent visitors	Frequent visitors
LA/US resources	11%	22%
UCLA resources	15%	23%
iStart	21%	35%
Dashew programs	19%	43%
Visa info/documents	55%	83%
Social events	20%	52%

The information above illustrates that the most website resources or programs are rarely or never visited by many of the constituents. However, visa information and resources are the most sought-after resource, drawing nearly half of the constituents to the website on an occasional or frequent basis. As such, we recommend that the Dashew Center ensure that visa information is kept as detailed and up-to-date as possible to best serve their constituents.

We see that constituents rarely visit the website seeking resources about transitioning to UCLA, Los Angeles, or the US. This may be due to previous familiarity with US culture, existing personal connections at UCLA or the US, or the fact that a number of constituents use other sites and sources to access these resources, as reported further below in this document. Dashew's programs and social events are also rarely visited; this may be partly because international students already feel comfortable with their own social circles or prefer to

---

[1] Students are defined as "frequent users" if they reported visiting the website sometimes/often in the past year, and "infrequent visitors" if they reported visiting the website rarely/never in the past year

integrate with non-international students in more natural situations. However, our interview participants suggested that lack of publicity may also be a cause.

Figures 2 and 3 show the percentage of survey respondents who felt various website information was "useful" or "very useful." Where Figure 2 shows the percentage of all respondents, Figure 3 removes any respondent who answered that they did not use the resource in question, therefore answering the question "of the people who *have* accessed the information, what percentage find it useful?" Each graph visually represents two groups: those who have attended UCLA for less than a year versus those who have attended for a year or more.

Figure 2. Resource usefulness - all respondents
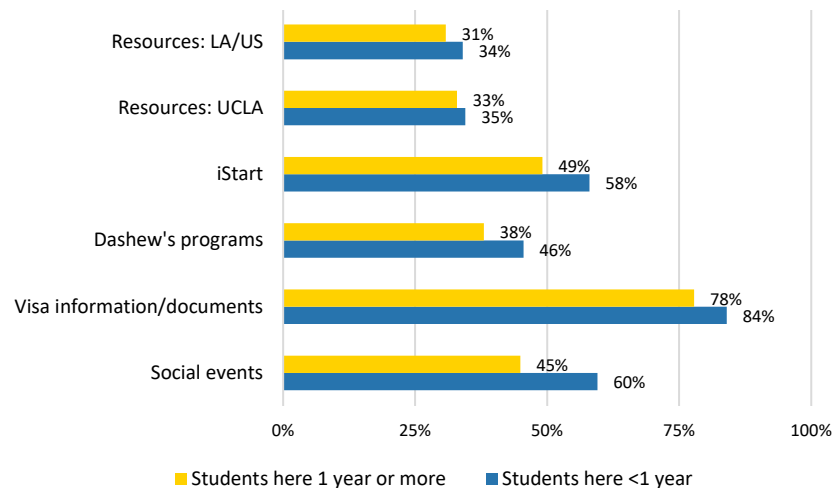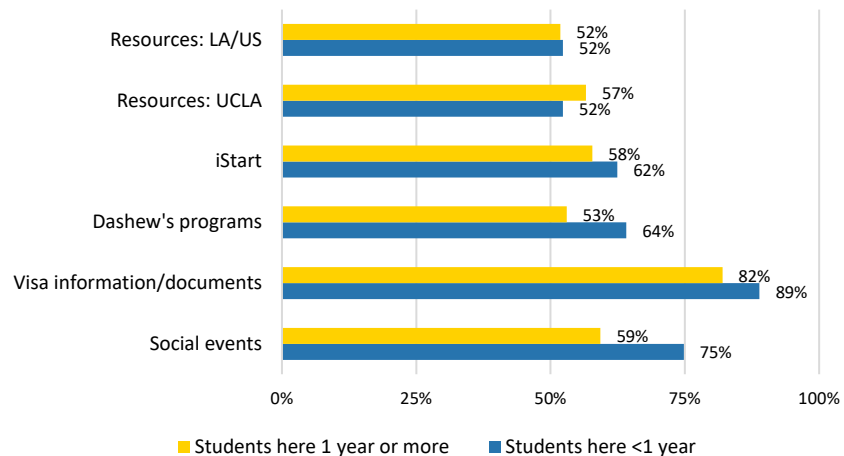% of respondents who found the information "useful" or "very useful"

Resource	Students here 1 year or more	Students here <1 year
Resources: LA/US	31%	34%
Resources: UCLA	33%	35%
iStart	49%	58%
Dashew's programs	38%	46%
Visa information/documents	78%	84%
Social events	45%	60%

Figure 3. Resource usefulness - only resource users
% of respondents who accessed the information and found it "useful" or "very useful"

Resource	Students here 1 year or more	Students here <1 year
Resources: LA/US	52%	52%
Resources: UCLA	57%	52%
iStart	58%	62%
Dashew's programs	53%	64%
Visa information/documents	82%	89%
Social events	59%	75%

Students found the visa information and documents most useful, with approximately 80% of respondents rating them "useful" or "very useful." Unsurprisingly based on the findings in Figure 1, resources about moving to UCLA/LA/US were rated the least useful.

We understand that the Dashew Center plans to update their website's resource map shortly. We suggest that the Dashew Center administer a short survey in spring 2020 as a method of assessing whether the frequency and reported utility of students' visits to the website for these resources have changed after the updates.

Information needed

In open-ended questions, students reported wanting to access the following information not currently available to them. Participants overwhelmingly requested (1) information on the tax return process, as well as (2) contact information for specific employees and/or topics so their questions could be addressed more effectively. In interviews, several constituents also requested testimonials where they could hear the experiences of other UCLA international students who had graduated and found work in the US.

A number of survey participants also requested an FAQ page. However, we recognize the difficulty of parsing the most important "frequently asked questions" on a site that aims to cover such a wide breadth of information needed by international students. We recommend that the Dashew Center consider updating its homepage frequently with information most relevant to students at that point in time: for example, information on the visa application and renewal process at the time when most students would need that information brought to their attention, or tax resources in the first quarter of the calendar year.

Ease of access to information

Fifty-two survey respondents (12%) reported having difficulty finding information of interest. One interview participant, asked to expand on navigational difficulty they had experienced, explained the following:

> "… [The website] is designed for someone who already knows everything, and knows that, oh, this would fall under this and that. But for someone who doesn't know where to look – for example, me – so confusing."

Another participant made a similar point, suggesting that information be linked under as many menus or tabs as possible, rather than only the one deemed most relevant, so that constituents could find information more easily even if they had not originally navigated to the "correct" menu.

Open-ended survey responses provided more clarity to the types of information students found difficult to find: visa information (12 responses), tax information (8), CPT/OPT (7), the process of making appointments with counselors (4), as well as employment information or other forms and documents (3 responses each). As reported by one student:

> "I think one problem I had was I didn't know how to make an appointment with an F-1 counselor and I remember trying to search it everywhere. And it says like 'If you need to do this, you need an appointment with an F-1 counselor. If you do this, you need an appointment with an F-1 counselor' and stuff like that but it really never explained what to do to get a counselor."

Very few respondents (9, or 2%) reported technical difficulties such as difficulty loading, particularly on specific devices such as the Pixel 2, iPhone, or DuckDuckGo browser.

The in-person think-aloud procedure was designed to assess the ease of access to three pieces of information: events happening next month, applying for off-campus internships (CPT/OPT), and opportunities to build confidence in English with other international students (English Circle). All of the 9 participants were able to find events and the English Circle program. However, three participants were not able to find the CPT/OPT information; in addition, of those who did, several had enough difficulty that the interviewers felt the participant may have left the website in an actual search. Five participants initially navigated to the menu labeled "Employment-Based," or stated that that would be the first place they would think to look for information on internships, suggesting that website users are under the impression that the "Employment-Based" menu refers to *information about employment in the US*, rather than *information for constituents at UCLA on an employment-based visa.* Finally, interviewees who found the information requested more detail, particularly in terms of eligibility requirements.

Methods of accessing information
How students currently access information

Figure 4 illustrates how constituents prefer to receive various types of information. Email and newsletter is the most popular platform (averaged across all types of information, 55% percent of respondents preferred that format), followed by the Dashew website (21% averaged across all types of information). We wish to note that this question does not specify, for example, whether students prefer not to receive information through various channels *in general*—e.g., they do not like receiving information through Twitter—or whether they prefer not to receive information through those channels *in their current format*—e.g., they use Twitter frequently but do not currently find it a useful source of Dashew information.

Figure 4. Preferred method of receiving information

% of respondents rating each method as preferred for specific information type
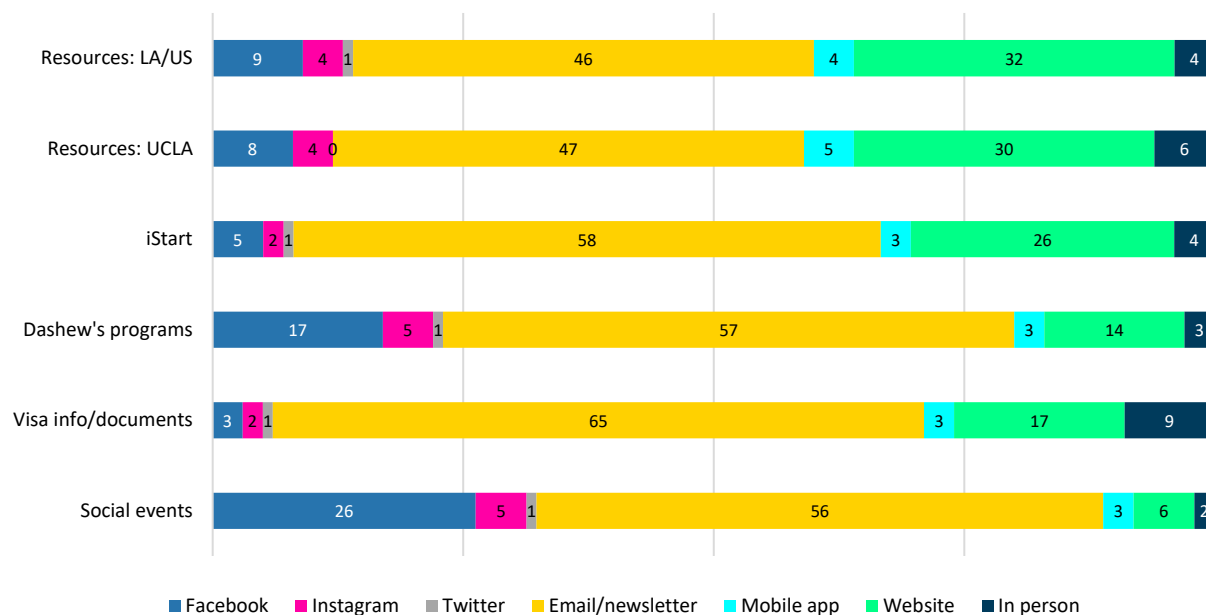
Apart from Dashew communication, students also reported accessing critical information through government websites (19/77 open survey responses), other university sites (14; the University of Washington was cited by several constituents as a useful source of information), Google searches (14), and social media (7).

Future needs

Constituents were asked directly if a live chat function would be helpful, with 56% responding "yes." Of those respondents, 41% specified wanting a live chat function for the purpose of obtaining visa information, while 38% simply wanted the feature for convenience, quick questions, and fast responses.

Thirty-five percent of survey respondents also expressed a wish for other online services, such as document submission, appointment scheduling, and employment information. Many indicated that they would find the website more useful if the site had more interactive services, such as those mentioned above, and if the information and resources were more concise, detailed, and up-to-date. Eighty-three responses cited the need for more detailed and up-to-date information; the most commonly requested information was as follows: employment/internship/research opportunities (12 responses), taxes (7), visas (5), and housing/living/rent (5). Our interviewees echoed these requests, outlining the kind of detail they wished to see:

> "I think first, more info about OPT and CPT and how it works, maybe just more of like a timeline sort of, like a typical 'when you should apply' and 'what to expect' because I know

that other schools' international student centers have that and that's what I've been referring to a lot."

Recommendations

Based on the constituent feedback reported above, we recommend the following changes or updates to Dashew's current website and methods of communication. The majority of these recommendations relate to the need for more ways to triage and upload information online:

1. A live chat feature
2. An online reservation system for appointments, and/or clearer and easier access to Dashew representatives and counselors
3. Online document/forms submission system
4. Online portal for student requests
5. Testimonials from former students who have remained in the US
6. An FAQ page, or, as suggested above, frequent updates to the website's homepage and relevant information pages to "market" time-sensitive resources to constituents

We also recommend several follow-up assessment topics the Dashew Center may want to pursue in the next academic year. As previously suggested, we suggest administering a follow-up survey assessing resource access and usefulness following updates to the current Resource section.

We have noted that a number of constituents indicated that they preferred to receive information through word of mouth from other international students. If the Dashew Center does decide to administer a follow-up assessment, we recommend adding an item to determine exactly which types of information students receive through word of mouth. Receiving information on, for example, visa regulations or tax processes through word of mouth can be problematic, as regulations vary from individual to individual. Therefore, the Dashew Center should ensure that students are receiving accurate, detailed information through official channels.

Conclusion

Though we have made a number of recommendations for improvement and future change, we wish to highlight that, in general, student responses indicate that the Dashew Center is serving its constituents through its current means of communication. In particular, Dashew's email and newsletters are an effective method of communication, with 55% of constituents reporting preferring receiving information that way. Forty-five percent of survey respondents also indicated that they first heard of the Dashew website through an email (more than any other method, including Google searches and mentions at orientation).

We also note that while we have highlighted difficulties or challenges reported by students, many students reported no such difficulties or challenges. For example, though we have noted various difficulties accessing certain types of needed information, we also wish to remind the Dashew Center that 86% of respondents, when asked, reported having no difficulties. Overall, 88% of participants responded that they were *slightly satisfied, satisfied,* or *very satisfied* with the website overall (66% of respondents fell in the *satisfied-very satisfied* range), and 82% of participants rated the website as *useful* or *very useful* in meeting their needs as an international student. Therefore, despite room for growth, the Dashew Center is fostering a positive system of communication and information accessibility.