



## Portal Investigation: Impressions on Student Focus Groups – July 2002 – Paula Millington

Here are some impressions of the focus groups I attended in July. Mark Woodland spoke with about 100 students in 5 different focus groups (a night class of seniors in the business school, a mix of sophomores and juniors from classes in Health Sciences and Communication, and student leadership groups from ASUU and LDSSA.)

1. The student population seems to be split into two distinct camps (although it might be some kind of continuum) we labeled as: 1) *Involved* and 2) *School is not my life*. The *involved* group is very enthusiastic about having some say over what might be on their individual portal. The *school is not my life* group could care less about the mechanism used; they just want to have convenient access to whatever they need to access to get through school. At first I thought it might be important to determine what percentage of our student population falls into these two categories. [National statistics suggest that only 15% of the student population is identified as the “typical college student” from 18-22 with school being their life. At the U, less than 4% voted in the ASUU elections.] Regardless of the percentages, both groups seem to argue for more personalization to get what they want online when they want it.
2. A small number of students have already configured another portal and didn’t see a need for us to spend a dime on a portal per se. However, most of the comments and requests pointed to some kind of technology that would allow them to customize their own page to their needs and wants. It was clear that they would like access to everything they need via the web – it could even be via email (deadlines, requirements).
3. There seemed to be little enthusiasm for setting up a portal; however, there was a strong consensus around making everything available on the web that we can. Typical comments: “Put anything we have to pay for on the web” (tickets, tuition, traffic tickets, books, everything). “Let us sign up for everything on the web” (events, email, etc.) “Give us our grades on specific assignments as soon as they are available.” “You could really make it useful if you gave us a complete package – like let us get the syllabus and books online when we register.” “Don’t make us stand in line.” “Don’t make us come to campus any more than we absolutely have to.” “Let us get to the library and e-reserves.”
4. Students visit utah.edu (they didn’t separate secured student access from the home page) a few times a week during the semester (64 of 100 reported visiting about 31 times during the semester.) The most common visits were to get grades, register, pay tuition (although some didn’t know it was available online), DARs, and any time they had to interact with the administration of the U. The current web page was described as “an enormous beast” and “the page that no one reads.” There seems to be some dichotomy between having a page that has every piece of information available on it and a page that affords access to transactions where they can really do something. They want only what they want and it seems that those wants have some commonalities with respect to administration, but personal tastes seem to vary widely. (Another possible argument for portal technology to deliver university information and services.)
5. PULL: Students wanted these types of features on their portal (or web access is fine too): student events, email, WebCT, their own links, library and e-reserves, courses, books, course syllabus, sports, news (U and CNN-alike), job opportunities and interview schedules, a place to work (store files, share with classmates, etc.), calendar, some kind of academic summary (where am I and what do I need to finish), phone numbers that I need, my contacts, etc.
6. PUSH: Students wanted this type of information pushed to them: guest speakers, student events, discount offers, deadlines, requirements, “today (maybe this week) at the U,” academic advising, parking, construction, transportation, individual scores from courses, what companies are interviewing on campus. Some wanted any info “screened” so they don’t get spam.
7. Privacy concerns were expressed. They don’t want spam and they don’t want their information used for anything they don’t specifically permit.

## Student Online Feedback on Portal –Summary for September 2002

### Highlights of Results:

- 213 student responses in 7 days (54,000 unique visitors, 800 clicks on the link, 264 completions)
- 70% of students are likely or very likely to create and use their own MyUtah.edu page
- 79% of students spend 0-9 hrs per week on university-related web visits
- 45% of students visit the home page everyday (80% visit every day or several days/week)
- 34% of students do not have portal pages already created (accounts already created: Yahoo 26%; MSN 26%; Other 16%; AOL 8%; Online News Portals 7%)
- 70% of students regularly check 2 or 3 email accounts

### A few demographic features of the sample:

- 21% of the students also listed themselves as staff
- 54% were Juniors or Seniors
- 28% of the students work 20-29 hours per week
- 45% of the students have cable, DSL or T1-3 connections (33% have 56k modems; 16% don't know; 4% other)
- 73% of students are 20-30 years old (54% are 20-24 age group)

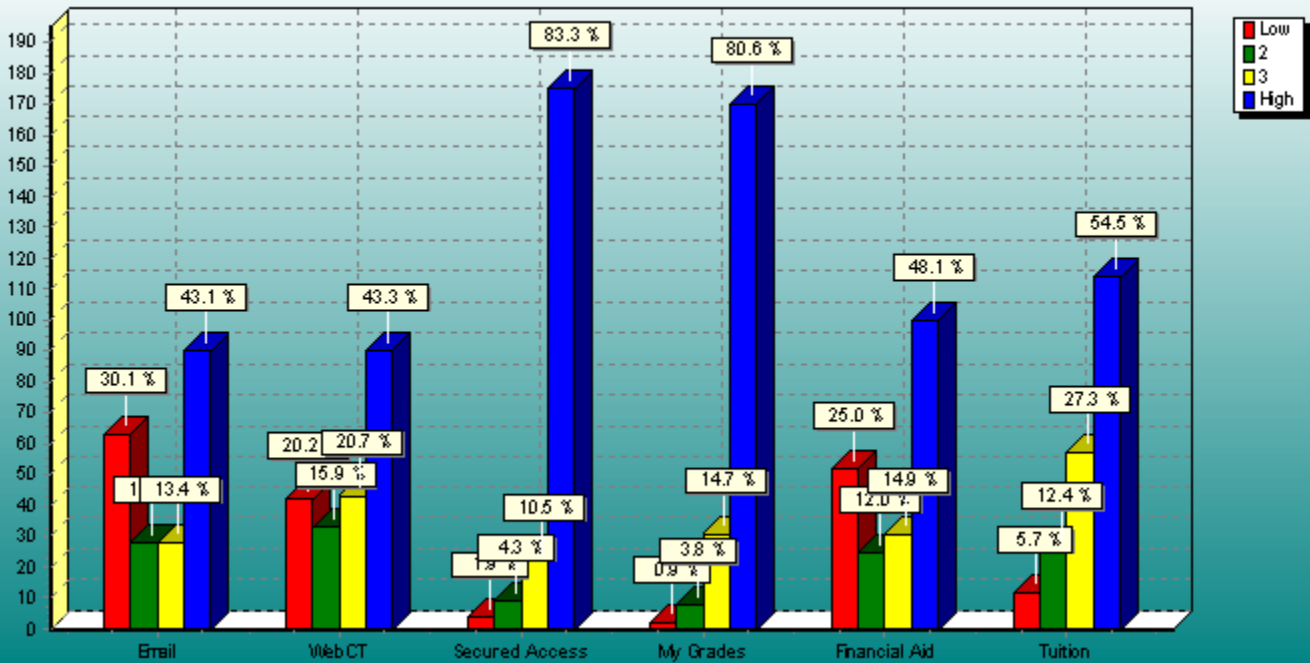
**Important Portal Features:** Students were asked to rank the following features in terms of importance (on a 1-4 scale, with 4 being most important). The first column below represents the percentage of students ranking the feature as 4, or of highest importance. The second column aggregates the percentage of students that ranked the feature as either 3 or 4 on the scale of importance.

Ranked as most important (4)	Ranked as important or most important (3 or 4)
1. Secured Access (personal information) 83%	1. My Grades 95%
2. My Grades 80%	2. Secured Access (personal information) 94%
3. Tuition 55%	3. University Deadlines 85%
4. University Deadlines 51%	4. Tuition 82%
5. Financial aid 48%	5. Library access 78%
6. Library access 48%	6. University Calendar 76%
7. WebCT 43%	7. Financial aid 63%
8. Email 43%	8. WebCT 64%
9. University Calendar 39%	9. University News 61%
10. Jobs/Careers 30%	10. Email 57%
11. Personal Links or Bookmarks 27%	11. Today on Campus (Events ) 57%
12. Today on Campus (Events ) 26%	12. Jobs/Careers 56%
13. Local or National News 26%	13. Local or National News 54%
14. Social Events Information 25%	14. Personal Links or Bookmarks 52%
15. Personal calendar 24%	15. Social Events Information 52%
16. Search Engine 24%	16. Search Engine 50%
17. University News 22%	17. Personal calendar 46%
18. Workspace/File Storage and Sharing 21%	18. Student Handbook 46%
19. Student Handbook 19%	19. Workspace/File Storage and Sharing 43%
20. Weather 16%	20. Weather 39%
21. Sports News 14%	21. Bulletin Board 34%
22. My Contacts 14%	22. My Contacts 31%
23. Bulletin Board 12%	23. Sports News 30%
24. Classified Ads 6%	24. Classified Ads 30%

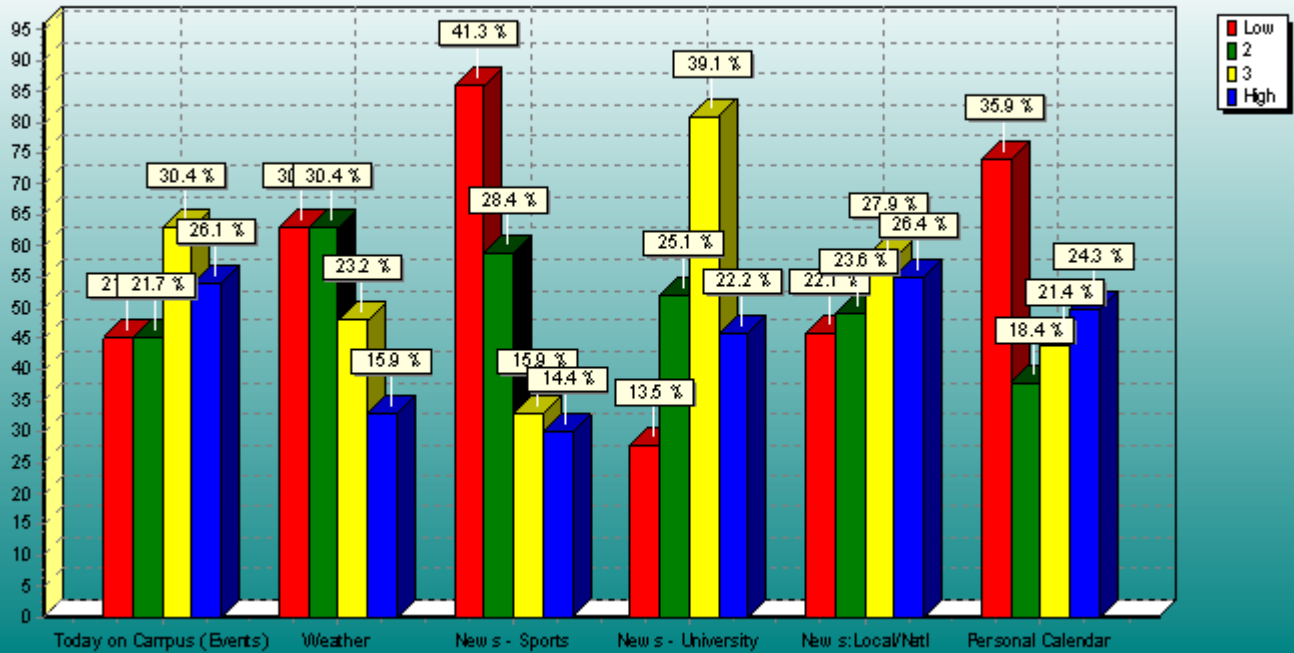
### Next Steps:

- Clean the data and continue the analysis. The students were given a number of text entry options to let us know what information they currently look for at the U, what kinds of transactions they would like online, what URLs they currently have bookmarked, and what kinds of things they would absolutely have to have on their MyUtah page for it to be their home page. This text must be compiled and analyzed as well.
- Develop the recommendations. Determine whether this sample of 213 is representative and adequate to make appropriate inferences.
- Continue polling and talking to students and refining the requirements document.
- Begin talking to faculty, staff, and other users.

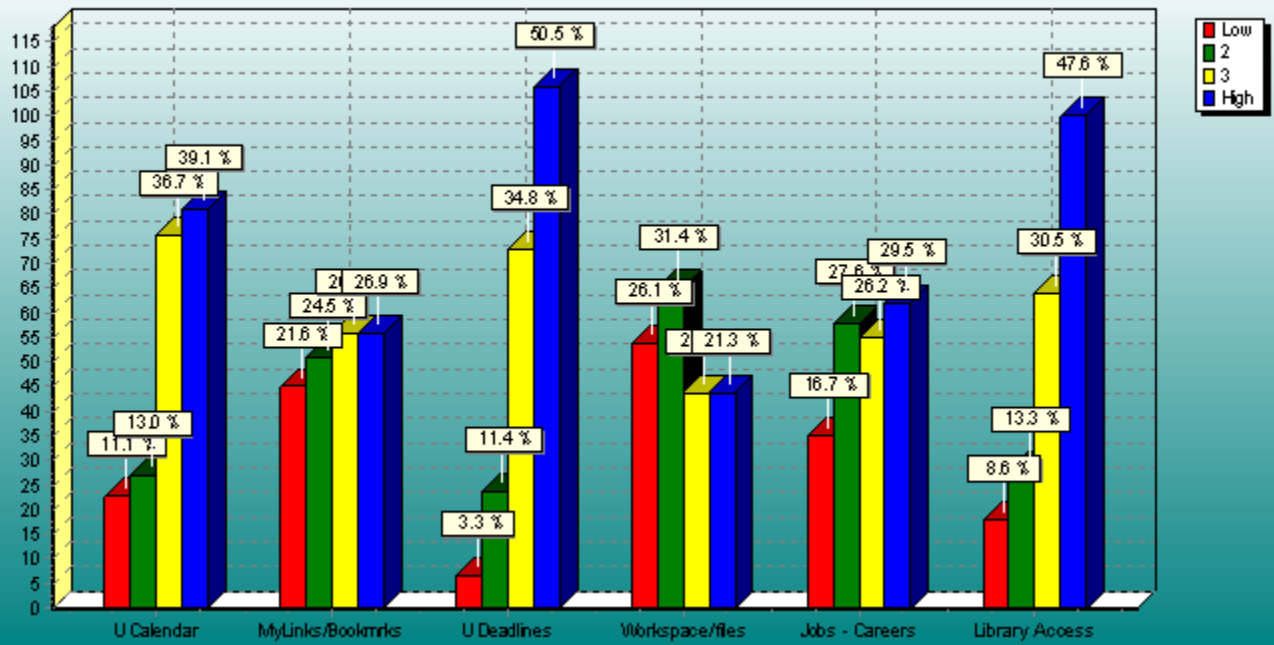
Please rate the following features in the MyUtah.edu page in terms of their importance to you.



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