

Pratt

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REMOTE USER TESTING: EVALUATION REPORT

Pratt Institute | Usability : Theory & Practice | INFO 644-01

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Executive Summary

Pratt Institute, founded in 1887, is a global leader in higher education with programs primarily in engineering, architecture, and the fine arts. As a leading institute in education, it is crucial for Pratt Institute's website to provide an informative and seamless experience to its users. This study specifically targets members of the community and evaluates how efficiently a user can navigate the "Events" and "News" sections of the Pratt Institute website.

The report identifies four problems and provides the following recommendations:

1. Provide an identifiable link to the event location (Desktop and Mobile)

The event page gives users detailed information about the event and location, but fails to guide users to the campus map. This problem can be solved by making the location name on the event page a clickable link to the campus map.

2. Restructure the events page (Desktop)

The users had difficulty using the events page calendar on the Pratt website because it did not respond as expected when selecting specific dates. A simple fix to this problem is to highlight the selected date with a different color than the current date. Also, the carousel adjacent to the event calendar takes up too much space, which prevents users from easily seeing the events listed below. This could be resolved by decreasing the height of the carousel.

3. Add corresponding city names to Campus Map titles (Desktop and Mobile)

Most of the users felt that the title for the campus map was unclear. They were unable to differentiate which campus they were looking at. Adding the campus's city to the title of the campus map will make it easy for users to identify which campus map they are looking at.

4. Add a 'Read more' link to articles listed on the News page (Mobile)

Users had difficulty reading Pratt news on mobile devices because it was not obvious to click on the article title to read the full story. Adding a clickable "Read more" option will help them navigate to the whole article.

Table of Contents

3	Introduction
4	Methodology
7	Results and Recommendations
7	<i>Recommendation 1. Provide an identifiable link to the event location (Desktop and Mobile)</i>
9	<i>Recommendation 2. Restructure the events page (Desktop)</i>
11	<i>Recommendation 3. Add corresponding city names to Campus Map titles (Desktop and Mobile)</i>
13	<i>Recommendation 4. Add a 'Read more' link to articles listed on the News Page (Mobile)</i>
15	Conclusion
16	References
17	Appendix I : Follow-up Question Responses
24	Appendix II : Video Recording Observations

Introduction

Pratt Institute, founded in 1887, is a global leader in higher education with programs primarily in engineering, architecture, and the fine arts. The university is known for its highly ranked programs in architecture, interior design, and industrial design, offering both undergraduate and master's degree programs with a strong focus on research ("Pratt Institute," 2019). In 2015, it was ranked 5th among the world's top colleges for art and design by QS in the QS World University Rankings ("Pratt Institute Ranked One of the World's Top Colleges for Art and Design by QS," 2016). As a global leader in education and the arts, it is crucial for Pratt Institute's website to provide an informative and seamless experience to a variety of users.

Pratt Institute hosts a number of events across its campuses, which can vary from gallery exhibitions to environmental conferences. These events are instrumental to increasing and improving the university's reputation and community relationships. This usability study evaluates how the Pratt website could be used by members of the community, specifically through the use of the "Events" and "News" sections. This report incorporates our findings and provides recommendations that will improve the efficiency of Pratt's website for community members.

Methodology

This study was conducted by four usability experts from Pratt Institute using a field method known as remote usability testing. This method is a field based user test that recruits participants and remotely records their experiences as they ‘think aloud’ while performing predetermined tasks. The tasks are presented to the participant via an online testing platform, which in this study was UserTesting (UserTesting.com). We had six participants perform the tasks on the desktop version of the Pratt Institute website and the other six using the mobile website.

The benefits of this method were reducing the high costs and time requirements needed to set up a face-to-face study, as well as allowing participants to perform tasks in their natural (non-laboratory) environments (Gray, 2015). By completing the study’s tasks in their own environments, the participants more accurately reflected how a modern day member of the community would ascertain information about Pratt events and initiatives. Particularly for members of the community who do not reside in NYC, users will search the university’s website for up-to-date information.

The disadvantage of remote usability testing is that evaluators are unable to clarify tasks to participants during the test. Evaluators must make adjustments after viewing the participant’s recording. Our team launched two iterations of our tasks before arriving at the ones listed in this report. However, due to the fast nature of this method, this setback only added a couple of days to our timeline.

Objective

The research objective of this study was to evaluate how efficiently a member of the community could navigate the “Events” and “News” sections on the Pratt Institute website.

Users

The user demographic we targeted was broad since “members of the community” can mean many things. Residents that live nearby the Pratt campuses were our primary focus, but community members can also refer to nearby universities or art related

organizations, art aficionados who may want to visit Pratt, volunteer organizations scoping out schools, etc. We filtered our participant demographic to users who were between the ages of 18 and 60, had an income of \$0 to \$100K, lived within the United States, and considered themselves “average web users” (as opposed to advanced web users).

Tasks and Follow-Up Questions

Before the participants see the tasks, the UserTesting platform will prompt them to imagine: “You are a member of the community using the Pratt Institute website to find information.” Immediately after, the users proceed to the predetermined tasks, only moving on from each task once completing the former.

Task 1

You want to attend an exhibition at Pratt Institute.

1. Look for an exhibition happening during the weekend.
2. Find the hours and venue of the exhibition you are looking at.
3. Find the campus entrance that is closest to the exhibition venue.

Task 2

You recently heard that Pratt Institute hosted a gala to raise funds for their student scholarships. Use the Pratt Institute website to read more about it.

After completing these two tasks, users were prompted to type out answers to the questions listed below. Their responses were used to inform the evaluators of the participants’ overall experience and are listed in full in Appendix I.

1. What one word would you use to describe your experience with pratt.edu today?
2. How would you rate your experience on this site on a scale from 1-4 (1 being poor, 4 being great)?
3. How does the Pratt website compare to other college/university websites you’ve visited? (Better, About the same, Worse, Not sure/Don’t Know)
4. Did you experience any difficulties when using the Pratt website? If so, please elaborate.

After receiving a total of twelve responses on UserTesting, each usability expert analyzed three videos and their corresponding responses in search of issues and comments that defined each user's experience. We compiled this information into a table (see Appendix II) and assigned each problem with a severity rating between 1 and 4 (1 being a cosmetic problem, 4 being a catastrophe). After averaging each expert's ratings, we determined which problems required the most immediate attention. Those problems have been outlined in the following Results and Recommendations section.

Results and Recommendations

Overall, the Pratt Institute website is logically configured and allows users to navigate without much hassle. It also has a clean layout and easy-to-understand titles on the navigation bar. Users described it as minimal and interesting, but confusing at times. After analyzing the participants' video recordings (see Appendix II for full comments and observations), fourteen problems were identified by twelve users. Out of these fourteen problems, four were found to be major problems which require improvement. Below are the four recommendations discussed in detail.

1. Provide an identifiable link to the event location (Desktop and Mobile)

When seeking an exhibition for Task 1, users were able to easily navigate to the screen containing detailed event information. Even though the event page gives users detailed information about the event and location, it fails to guide users to the campus map (see Fig. 1 & 3). The users had difficulties locating specific buildings and were confused where the gallery was situated on the campus map.

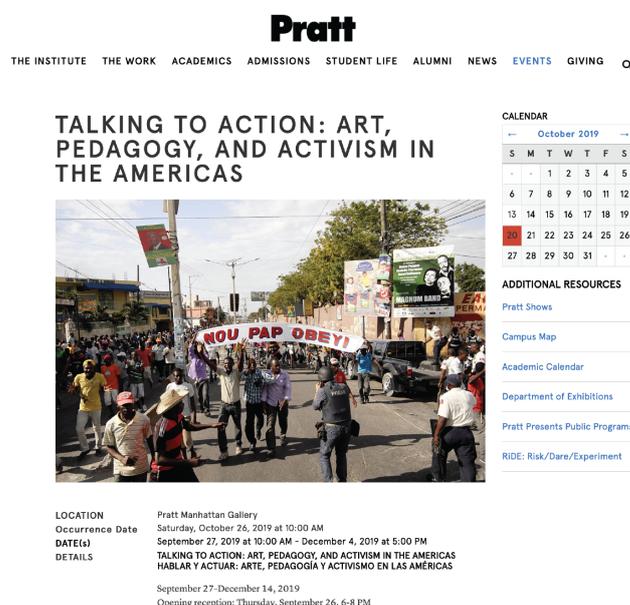


Fig. 1 : Existing page (Desktop)

To improve the process of locating an event on campus, we recommend making the location name on the event page a clickable link to the campus map (see Fig. 2 & 4).

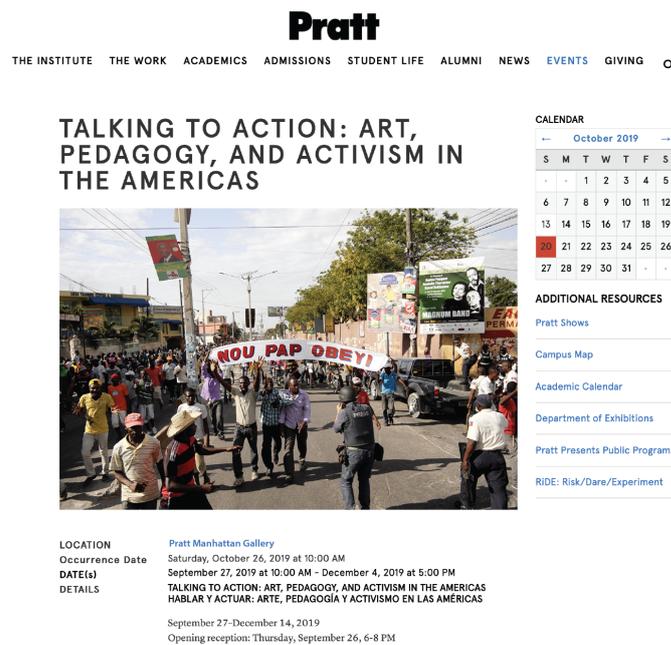


Fig. 2 : Event page mock-up with location linked to campus map (Desktop)

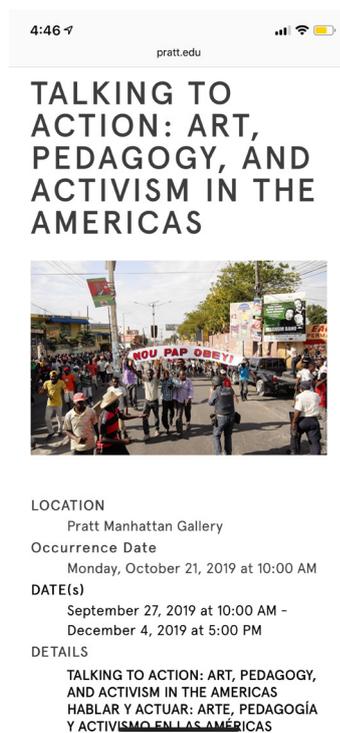


Fig. 3 : Existing page (Mobile)

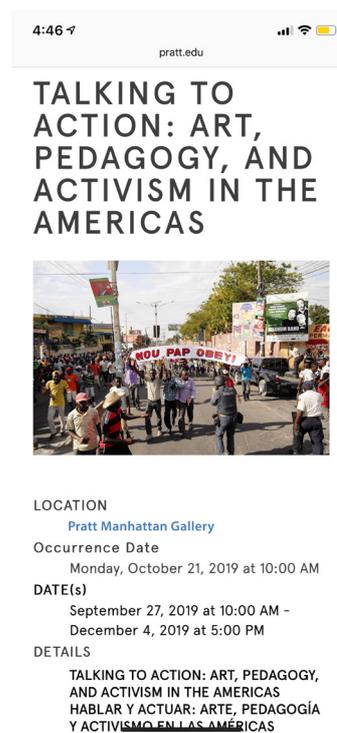


Fig. 4 : Event page mock-up with location linked to campus map (Mobile)

2. Restructure the events page (Desktop)

While completing Task 1, users mentioned they are comfortable with seeing calendars on event pages. However, the users had difficulty using the Pratt website's calendar to find events. They found it confusing that the calendar did not respond as expected when clicking specific dates (e.g. When a user clicked on the 26th of October, the highlighted date remained the current date and not the date they selected). (see Fig. 5)



Fig. 5 : Existing page

A simple way to fix this problem is to highlight the selected date with a different color. This will help to indicate the date the user has selected. (see Fig. 6)



Fig. 6 : Mock-up of how the calendar shall respond to the date selection

Also, the carousel adjacent to the event calendar is a great way to show featured events, but it takes up too much space on the screen and prevents users from seeing the list of events beneath it.

An ideal alternative would be to show images of the selected date's events on the carousel. However, an easier and quicker way to resolve this issue is to decrease the height of the carousel in a way that the listed events are not hidden below it. Our example matches the carousel to the calendar's height. (see Fig. 7)

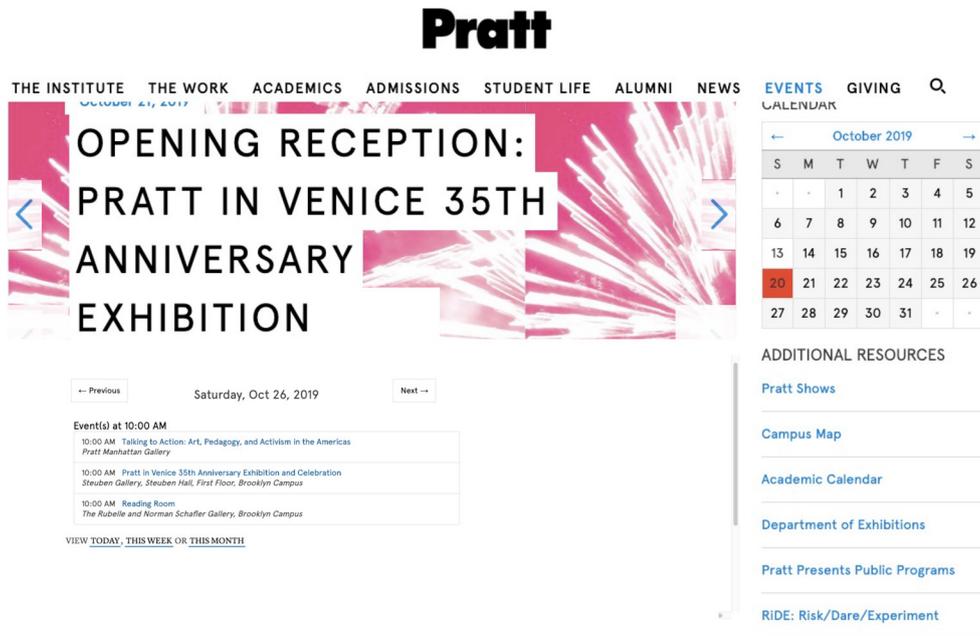


Fig. 7 : Mock-up of the compressed carousel

3. Add corresponding city names to Campus Map titles (Desktop and Mobile)

The users were pleased by the fact that the Pratt website had a campus map, since according to them not many universities provide this feature. One problem that users pointed out was that they were not able to differentiate if it was the Manhattan or Brooklyn campus map they were looking at. Most of them felt the title was unclear. (see Fig. 8 & 10)

[Campus Map](#)

Accessible Route to Elevator
in Main Building

[Directions: Brooklyn Campus](#)

[Directions: Manhattan Campus](#)

[Interactive Campus Map](#)

Pratt Institute Campus Directory

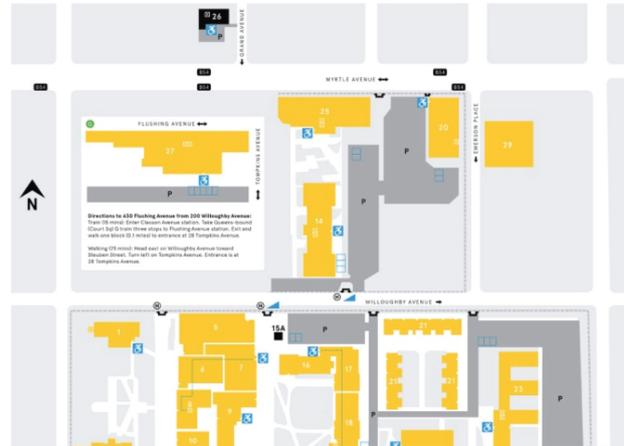


Fig. 8 : Existing Campus Map (Desktop)

Changing the title of the Campus Map from "Pratt Institute Campus Directory" to "Pratt Institute Brooklyn Campus Directory" will allow users to more clearly navigate and identify which campus they are looking at. (see Fig. 9 & 11)

[Campus Map](#)

Accessible Route to Elevator
in Main Building

[Directions: Brooklyn Campus](#)

[Directions: Manhattan Campus](#)

[Interactive Campus Map](#)

Pratt Institute Brooklyn Campus Directory



Fig. 9 : Mock-up of Campus Map with campus name (Desktop)

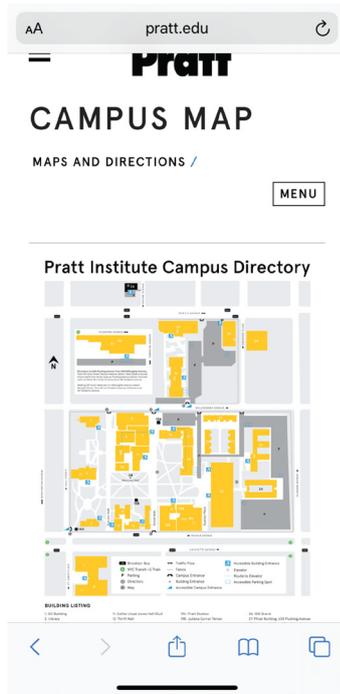


Fig. 10 : Existing page (Mobile)

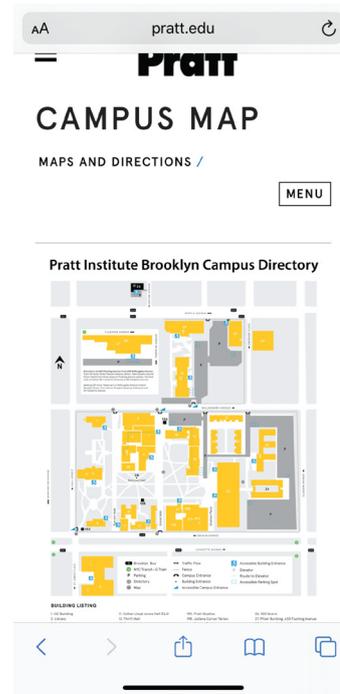


Fig. 11 : Mock-up of Campus Map with campus name (Mobile)

4. Add a 'Read more' link to articles listed on the News page (Mobile)

The users were able to easily navigate through the News section on the Pratt website because the articles were displayed clearly. The structure of the News page is well organized and consistent with how other news websites display their information.

However, while testing for Task 2 on the mobile device, users had difficulty reading the entire content of a particular article. They did not identify that tapping the article title will redirect them to a page with the entire article. Instead, they would read the article preview, then scroll down on the same page to read the rest of the article. (See Fig. 12)

Adding a clickable "Read more" link will guide users to navigate to the full article. (see Fig. 13)



Fig. 12 : Existing page



Fig. 13 : Mock-up with 'Read More'

Conclusion

The Pratt website provides a plethora of information for various groups such as current students, prospective students (and their families), and members of the community. The website itself has a modern and minimal design with a logical flow of information that leaves users satisfied with the overall mechanics of the website. Users who are interested in finding Pratt events and initiatives are able to find more information on the Pratt Institute website, albeit with some difficulty.

After identifying four major problems, the report recommends:

1. Provide an identifiable link to the event location (Desktop and Mobile)
2. Restructure the events page (Desktop)
3. Add corresponding city names to Campus Map titles (Desktop and Mobile)
4. Add a 'Read more' link to articles listed on the News page (Mobile).

The recommendations provided in this report will help increase the usability of the website and allow members of the community to use it to its full potential.

References

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Appendix I : Follow-up Question Responses

Participant 1

37 | Female | \$40,000-\$59,999

- **What one word would you use to describe your experience with pratt.edu today?**
Confusing
- **How would you rate your experience on this site on a scale from 1-4 (1 being poor, 4 being great)?**
2
- **How does the Pratt website compare to other college/university websites you've visited? (Better, About the same, Worse, Not sure/Don't Know)**
Better
- **Did you experience any difficulties when using the Pratt website? If so, please elaborate.**
Found it hard to find the information and particular locations on the website. I am finding ways to easily complete the task but that is not happening.

Participant 2

28 | Male | Less than \$19,000

- **What one word would you use to describe your experience with pratt.edu today?**
Efficient
- **How would you rate your experience on this site on a scale from 1-4 (1 being poor, 4 being great)?**
4
- **How does the Pratt website compare to other college/university websites you've visited? (Better, About the same, Worse, Not sure/Don't Know)**
Better

- **Did you experience any difficulties when using the Pratt website? If so, please elaborate.**

Overall I really like this website. I like how everything is bolded and things are clearly laid out and there is not a lot of clutter. Everything is well divided and pops off the screen. It's a very clean and simple layout and I generally like that over a busy background.

Participant 3

* Demographics were not provided by the user.

- **What one word would you use to describe your experience with pratt.edu today?**

Frustrating

- **How would you rate your experience on this site on a scale from 1-4 (1 being poor, 4 being great)?**

1

- **How does the Pratt website compare to other college/university websites you've visited? (Better, About the same, Worse, Not sure/Don't Know)**

Worse

- **Did you experience any difficulties when using the Pratt website? If so, please elaborate.**

Yes. Trying to find a gala and share it was extremely difficult and actually frustrating. Everything I clicked on was an educated guess eventually leading me to use the search bar which shockingly helped much.

Participant 4

33 | Female | \$60,000-\$79,999

- **What one word would you use to describe your experience with pratt.edu today?**

Nice and pleasant

- **How would you rate your experience on this site on a scale from 1-4 (1 being poor, 4 being great)?**

2

- **How does the Pratt website compare to other college/university websites you've visited? (Better, About the same, Worse, Not sure/Don't Know)**
Worse
- **Did you experience any difficulties when using the Pratt website? If so, please elaborate.**
Hard to read the map

Participant 5

38 | Female | Less than \$19,000

- **What one word would you use to describe your experience with pratt.edu today?**
Interesting
- **How would you rate your experience on this site on a scale from 1-4 (1 being poor, 4 being great)?**
3
- **How does the Pratt website compare to other college/university websites you've visited? (Better, About the same, Worse, Not sure/Don't Know)**
Actually I have visited a couple college websites as I was interested in going back to school and I do have to say that Pratt has a lot more information than others I have visited. Instead of just a general description and an application of some sort they give pretty good detail about what the school provides and the campus layout and financial assistance. I appreciate a lot.
- **Did you experience any difficulties when using the Pratt website? If so, please elaborate.**
It took me a minute to navigate through to find exactly what I was looking for but I got the hang of it but that's pretty much the same with a lot of new websites I have visited.

Participant 6

40 | Female | Less than \$19,000

- **What one word would you use to describe your experience with pratt.edu today?**
Educational

- How would you rate your experience on this site on a scale from 1-4 (1 being poor, 4 being great)?
3
- How does the Pratt website compare to other college/university websites you've visited? (Better, About the same, Worse, Not sure/Don't Know)
About the same
- Did you experience any difficulties when using the Pratt website? If so, please elaborate.
I had difficulty finding the map of the campus.

Participant 7

40 | Female | \$40,000-\$59,999

- What one word would you use to describe your experience with pratt.edu today?
Easy
- How would you rate your experience on this site on a scale from 1-4 (1 being poor, 4 being great)?
4
- How does the Pratt website compare to other college/university websites you've visited? (Better, About the same, Worse, Not sure/Don't Know)
Very user friendly. I was able to find the information I need very fast and efficient.
- Did you experience any difficulties when using the Pratt website? If so, please elaborate.
I didn't have any difficulties.

Participant 8

42 | Female | \$60,000-\$79,999

- What one word would you use to describe your experience with pratt.edu today?
Ordinary

- How would you rate your experience on this site on a scale from 1-4 (1 being poor, 4 being great)?

3

- How does the Pratt website compare to other college/university websites you've visited? (Better, About the same, Worse, Not sure/Don't Know)

About the same

- Did you experience any difficulties when using the Pratt website? If so, please elaborate.

I didn't have any difficulties but some tasks took longer than I would have liked because the information I needed was way down at the bottom of the page.

Participant 9

41 | Male | \$60,000-\$79,999

- What one word would you use to describe your experience with pratt.edu today?

Minimal

- How would you rate your experience on this site on a scale from 1-4 (1 being poor, 4 being great)?

3

- How does the Pratt website compare to other college/university websites you've visited? (Better, About the same, Worse, Not sure/Don't Know)

Cannot seem to find the share button, but very good overall. Based around content vs. usability.

- Did you experience any difficulties when using the Pratt website? If so, please elaborate.

Could not find easiest entrance and share button.

Participant 10

21 | Female | Less than \$19,000

- What one word would you use to describe your experience with pratt.edu today?

Difficult

- **How would you rate your experience on this site on a scale from 1-4 (1 being poor, 4 being great)?**

1

- **How does the Pratt website compare to other college/university websites you've visited? (Better, About the same, Worse, Not sure/Don't Know)**

Worse

- **Did you experience any difficulties when using the Pratt website? If so, please elaborate.**

Yes, I found the website extremely difficult to navigate.

Participant 11

27 | Female | \$60,000-79,999

- **What one word would you use to describe your experience with pratt.edu today?**

Surprising and confusing

- **How would you rate your experience on this site on a scale from 1-4 (1 being poor, 4 being great)?**

1 - I could not operate the maps portion and am disappointed there was no share button

- **How does the Pratt website compare to other college/university websites you've visited? (Better, About the same, Worse, Not sure/Don't Know)**

University websites set a low bar in interactivity but that doesn't mean that you shouldn't make your website as good as a regular website. Overall, my impression was not good.

- **Did you experience any difficulties when using the Pratt website? If so, please elaborate.**

Yes, a lot. Where is the share button? Why in the world is there directions written out? Why couldn't I operate or find the correct maps? The calendar was extremely confusing.

Participant 12

21 | Male | Less than \$19,000

- **What one word would you use to describe your experience with pratt.edu today?**

Doable

- **How would you rate your experience on this site on a scale from 1-4 (1 being poor, 4 being great)?**

2/4

- **How does the Pratt website compare to other college/university websites you've visited? (Better, About the same, Worse, Not sure/Don't Know)**

Although the overall configuration of the site is logical and allows me to navigate without too much hassle, I was disappointed by the lack of specificity when it came to looking at an event's location. Although the location tends to display the hall and floor, it neglects to provide the street name that the hall is adjacent or nearby to- and that would've saved me 10 minutes from having to rummage through the campus map. As an aside, I do appreciate the fact that the campus map was included - since many university sites don't provide this feature - but I just wish that the event location (including street name) was simply published directly on the site page instead.

- **Did you experience any difficulties when using the Pratt website? If so, please elaborate.**

Nothing was challenging to navigate through, and I tended to locate specific events and news articles with ease; my problems only came when looking for specific event locations. The website itself has a contemporary design with a logical flow of information, and the mechanics of the site itself weren't what slowed me down. Ultimately, I just wish I didn't have to read the entire campus map simply to locate an event.

Appendix II : Video Recording Observations

A = Evaluator 1's severity rating

B = Evaluator 2's severity rating

C = Evaluator 3's severity rating

D = Evaluator 4's severity rating

Severity rating scale = 1 being a cosmetic problem, 4 being a catastrophe

Problem	When and where it occurred	A	B	C	D	Final
Could not locate the "Campus Map."	Overall	4	3	2	3	3
Website needs work to make the navigation more clear.	Overall	1	2	3	1	2
Map was very difficult to read, have to analyze the entire campus map simply to locate a single building.	Campus map	3	2	2	1	2
Heavy visual load of text on the pages. Certain resources are not visible due to users not considering scrolling to the bottom of the page.	Home page, Events home page, Individual event's page	1	1	3	2	2

Problem	When and where it occurred	A	B	C	D	Final
Pictures adjacent to the calendar (the carousel) are confusing because they do not match the dates selected and consistently appear when page reloads after selecting different dates.	Events home page	4	4	2	3	3
No visual feedback on the calendar, unclear if clicking on dates had any effect.	Events home page	4	2	2	3	3
The text of dates and hours is small/difficult to read.	Events home page	3	1	2	1	1
No differentiation shown between types of events. Users assume all events listed are exhibitions.	Events home page	1	3	2	2	2
Legend was either hard to find or too complicated to read. Many users did not	Campus map	2	2	2	2	2

Problem	When and where it occurred	A	B	C	D	Final
use the legend. The list of buildings was not seen either.						
Yellow “Consent Agreement” conceals important content, especially on mobile browsers. Most users leave the yellow bar and never click the agreement away.	Overall	1	2	1	1	1
Users easily find article for the task but don’t click on the title to read the full article. They begin reading the description and scroll down for more before attempting to click on the title.	News home page	3	1	1	2	2
Multiple ‘map’ and ‘directions’ links that only slightly vary in content led users to aimlessly navigate back and forth between multiple pages. “The maps	Maps and Directions, Campus Map, Directions link listed in the footer with all the campus addresses and phone numbers	4	3	2	2	3

Problem	When and where it occurred	A	B	C	D	Final
didn't stick out to me like it should have."						
Map is difficult to see and maneuver on mobile devices.	Campus map	2	2	2	3	2
Campus map does not provide any information on nearby parking.	Campus map	4	2	3	1	1