How We Find *(or Don't Find)* Personal Digital Documents

Lucy VanderKamp, MSLS 2014

Journey into participants'

- **Habits**
- **Memories**
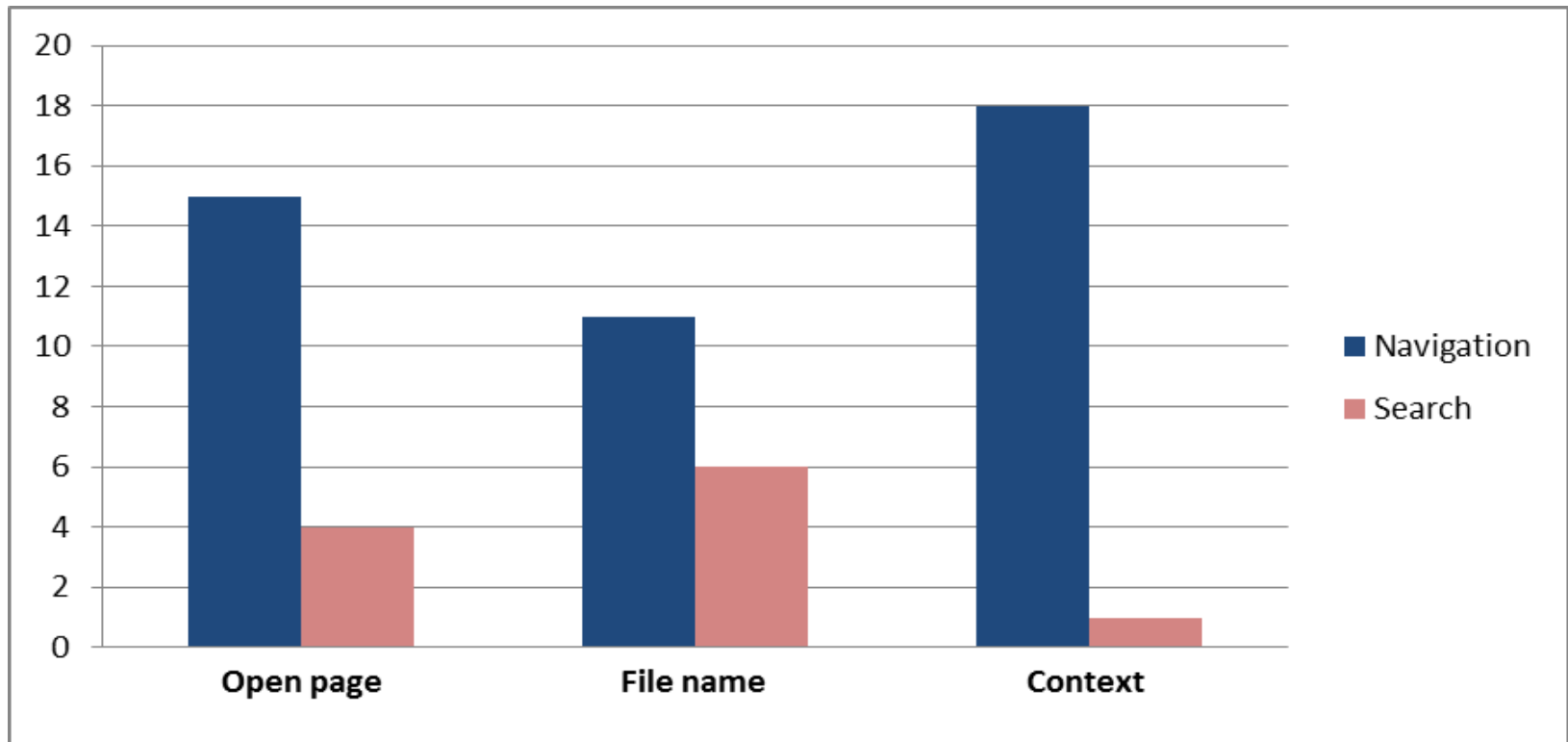- **Processes**

Selecting Documents

- **Screen recording**

- **Search "users" folder for word documents from 6 weeks to 4 months ago**

- **Ask about a class from last semester**

- **Different from previous studies which used recent documents**

Retrieval Prompts

1) First *open page* (file name hidden)

2) Document's *file name*
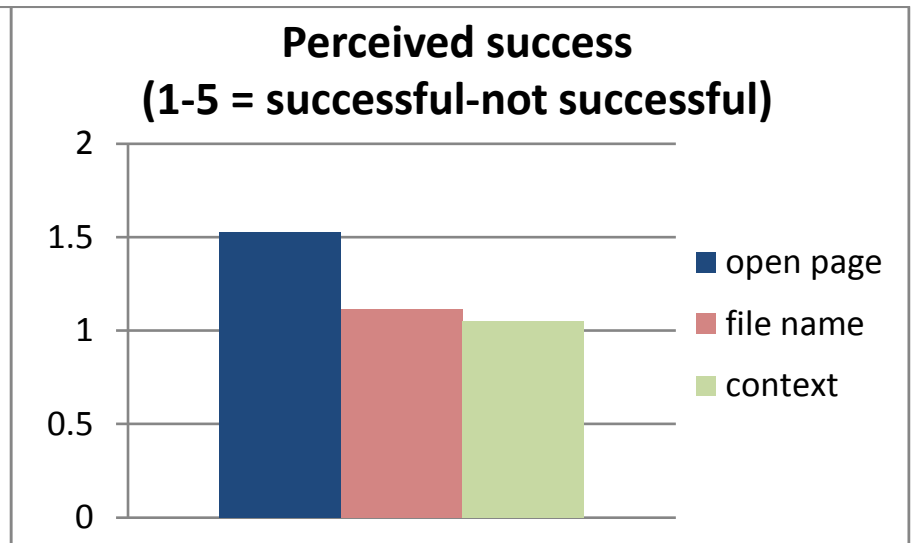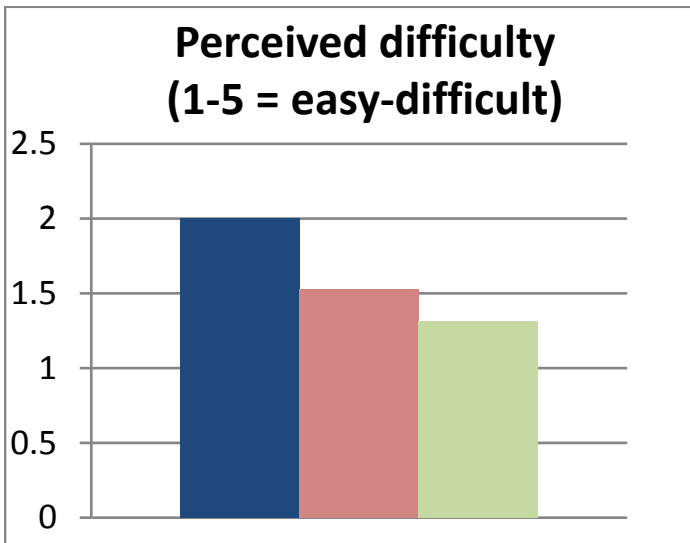
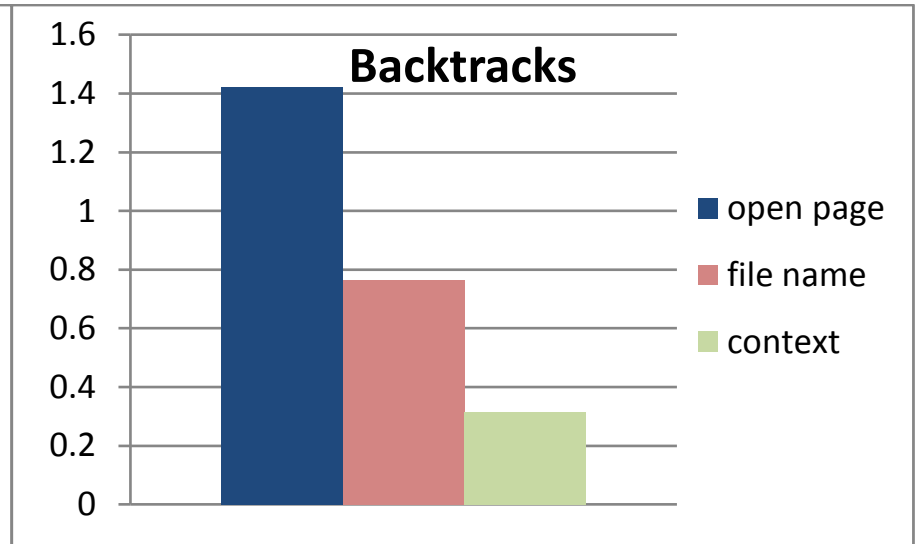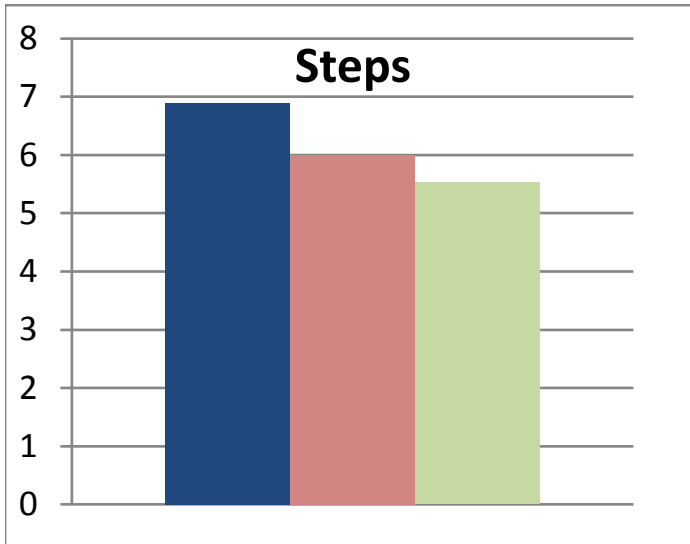3) Description of *context*

Results

- **80% of retrievals used navigation through folders**
- **20% used search**
- **Retrieval prompts affected the finding method**

Retrieval Effects (1)

Open page prompt

- **Presented the most difficulties**
- **Versioning – especially onerous with student population**
- **Downloads – group projects**

Steps

Backtracks

- open page
- file name
- context

Perceived difficulty (1-5 = easy-difficult)

Perceived success (1-5 = successful-not successful)

- open page
- file name
- context

Retrieval Effects (2)

File name prompt

- **Resulted in the most use of the search function**
- **Fast – search is faster**
  - Search average = 13 seconds, navigation average = 24 seconds
- **Inaccurate (2 failures)**
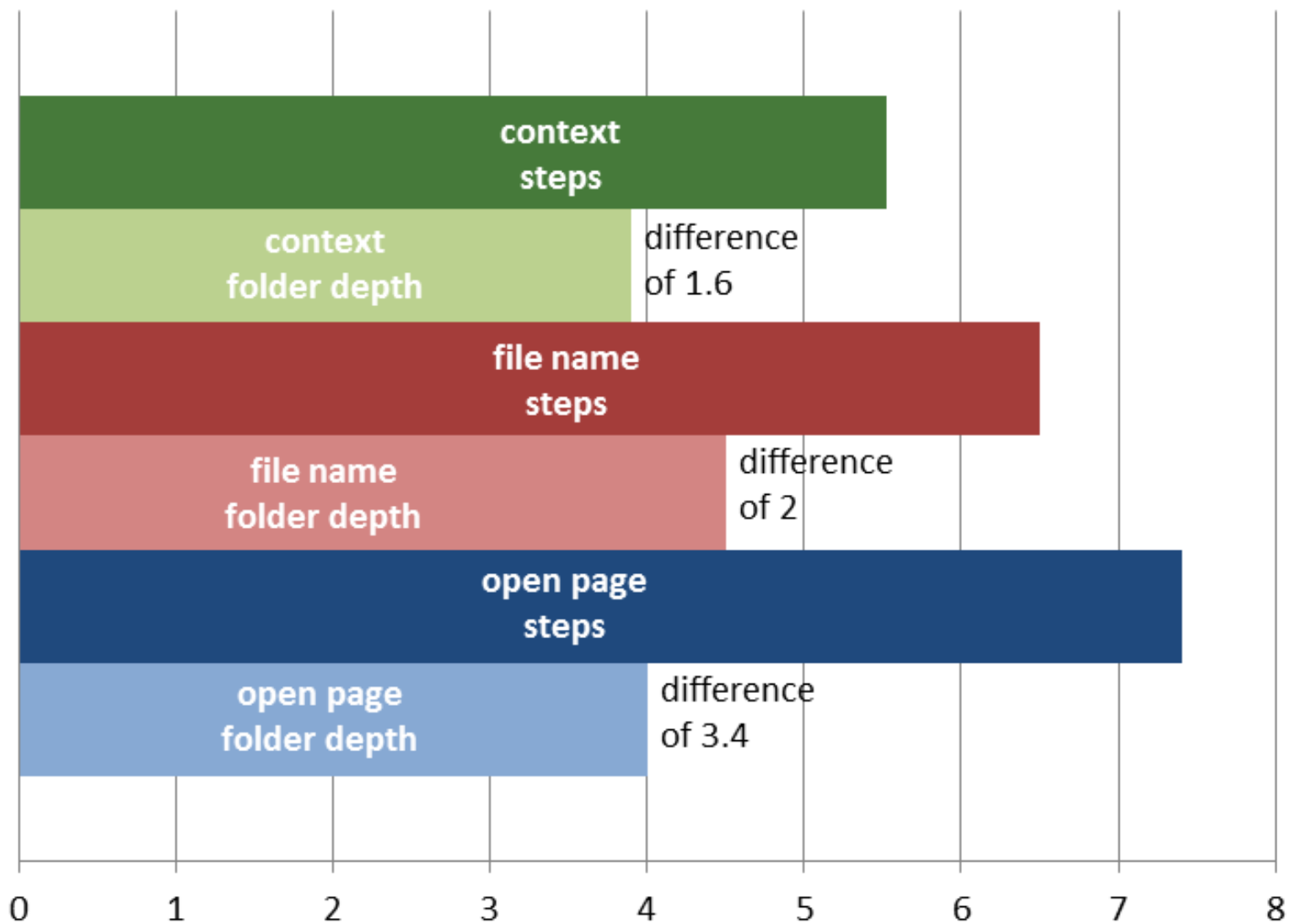
Retrieval Effects (2) cont...

- **Where search? 4 searched folder, 9 searched "programs and files"**
  - **All but one of these 9 gave up and returned to navigation**
  - **Average number of steps – folder search = 3, "programs and files" search = 6.4**
  - **Average time for – folder search = 9.5 seconds, "programs and files" search – 47.6**

Retrieval Effects (3)

Context prompt

- **Almost all used navigation through folders**

- **"Recalling the context of initial information encounter is a powerful facilitator for refinding" (Barreau et al., 2008)**

- **Last semester as a universal concept to students – not much variation in hierarchy structure**

- **Number of steps correlates to folder depth**

Steps and folder depth correlation

context steps	
context folder depth	difference of 1.6
file name steps	
file name folder depth	difference of 2
open page steps	
open page folder depth	difference of 3.4

0   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8

Limitations

- **Choose 5th and 10th, etc. – resulted in similar time period items**

- **Downloads folder**

- **Partitioned drives, zipped folders, didn't use Microsoft word…**