



Website Management at CUA

The **WHO**, **WHAT** and **HOW** of Successful Web pages

PRESENTATION NOTES

Presentation Outline/Summary

Introduction: The goal of this training is to sharpen our thinking about website management so we can improve the quality and effectiveness of all of the websites within the cua.edu domain. The emphasis of this session is not on learning technical skills, but rather on learning how to use the Web to achieve strategic goals.

Frame of reference: The conversion from the old CMS to Topaz is nearly complete. Recall what the site looked like and how it functioned then compared to now. Identify specific improvements.

Challenge: President John Garvey, in his introductory address to the faculty and staff, challenged us to raise our ambitions as an academic institution to the highest possible degree. “We need to be the equal of or better than our other academic counterparts,” he said.

Three questions: This training session will focus on raising our ambitions for the websites we manage by addressing three questions:

Who? The first is, “Who is our primary target audience?”

What? There are two “what” questions: What are our goals for this audience? And what content will help to achieve these goals?

How? The third question can be answered only after consideration of the first two: How will you develop content on your website to engage your audience and achieve your goals?

Internal vs. external audience? It is challenging, but not impossible, to serve both internal and external users with the same website. The websites managed by academic departments should focus on prospective undergraduate and/or graduate students as the primary audience, but also need to serve current students, faculty and alumni. An information architecture that offers both topic-based and audience-based navigation strategies can help resolve this dilemma. *See the Information Architecture section of Resources & References document.*

Prospective students: Virtually 100 percent of prospective undergraduate students visit websites as part of their college search process, according to a 2010 survey by the [Noel-Levitz](#) consulting firm. Nearly half visit college websites several times a week.

Here at CUA, the campus visit most often seals the deal. According to this survey, 24 percent of students decided what schools NOT to visit because of a bad website experience, while 65 percent say a positive Web experience made them more interested in a particular college. A positive or negative website experience was determined largely by whether they found what they were looking for.

Some questions prospective undergraduate students have when they visit our websites:

- Will they “fit in” at CUA?
- Does CUA have the major they want?
- Can they get in?
- Can they afford it?
- What courses are required?
- What is student life like here?

Virtually all of the students who end up coming here visited our website during their college application process. We don’t know how many prospective students visited our site, didn’t find what they were looking for, and moved on without giving CUA serious consideration.

Every undergraduate academic department’s website should include a prominent invitation for prospective students to come for a campus visit, and answers to the basic questions students ask.

Prospective graduate students come to our website with a different set of basic questions. For example, doctoral students’ most important considerations include the specific program of study, the professors with whom they will work and the availability of graduate fellowships. When they come to the CUA website, they’re probably looking for faculty bios, for example.

Professional part-time graduate students are probably looking for a) classes they need, b) convenient class times and c) easy accessibility to campus.

Clearly defining the audience focus of your website is a critical step in developing its content strategy and navigation.

Who is responsible? Website management should to be integrated into the daily workflow of every department. In addition to frontline content contributors and staff who are assigned to maintain departmental websites, key decision makers also should be actively involved. The website should be a central part of all strategic planning, marketing, development and alumni relations.

Special audiences: We are required by law to be especially cognizant of two: people with disabilities, who are covered by Section 508 of the Americans with Disabilities Act; and our own students, who are covered under the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act.

Section 508: CUA is committed to the goal of making our websites usable by people of all abilities and disabilities. Information about steps website contributors can take to support that goal can be found by using the links listed in the *Resources & References appendix*.

FERPA: The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act is a privacy law about student education records.

Four main principles:

- No disclosure, as a rule, of education records
- If disclosed, notice to student required if not pursuant to an exception
- Access for student to view records.
- Student may ask for errors to record be corrected

Directory Information is an exception to the no-disclosure rule

See definition in [CUA Student Records Policy](#)

Students can opt out so that directory information may not be disclosed.



Cardinal Station notes non-disclosure status with an icon, which is a closed shade.

Always check for the shade before posting any directory information on a student.

Do not post non-directory information on a Web page without waiver by student.

See Resources & References appendix for more FERPA information.

What are your goals, and what content will help achieve them? Consulting with others in your department can be helpful in clarifying goals and coming up with content ideas. The group brainstorming exercise in this section is one model for how a consultative process could be initiated in the various departments of the university.

Content that supports you goals should be:

Selective – Only content that directly supports your goals deserves to be displayed prominently on your Web page. The less selective you are, the harder it is for users to find what they want.

Organized – A well organized page will present a hierarchy of information. Help users find the most important content by placement, heading size, photos and other visual cues.

Engaging – Content that speaks directly to the user and draws them in with information that is tailored to their interests.

Relatable – Remember “will I fit in?” Including a human element on your page will give users a way to relate to your department in a personal way.

Considerate – A thoughtful approach to Web content that anticipates users’ questions, respects their time, offers them logical next steps, etc.

Usable – Content should be designed to be scanned. Usability can mean a lot of things, but it starts with relevant, well organized, engaging content that users can access easily and move through quickly to find what they’re looking for.

How to develop content that will engage your audience and achieve your goals?

Use the **Who? What? How?** model.

Learn to use Topaz.

Topaz is a Web content management system. It was custom-made for us to accomplish several purposes, among them:

- To strengthen the online brand identity of The Catholic University of America. Pages are designed and formatted so each department can have a distinctive look, yet remain consistent with the look, feel and functionality of the rest of the cua.edu domain.

- A second purpose of Topaz is to enable a large number of people across the university to easily post content to our websites without having to know HTML or Java script. The coding and formatting is built into the system.

Here are some of the content elements you can create in Topaz: *See Topaz Tips section of the Resources & References appendix for more detailed information.*

- A descriptive page title, such as Engineering Undergraduate Majors - Catholic University of America, that displays in the title bar of the.
- Headings of different sizes and normal text that give users an overview of the most relevant and important content on your site, with links to explore these topics more deeply.
- Numbered lists and bullet lists to make your content easy to scan.
- Photos, including a banner image, that convey relevant information about the department and/or the people in it.

Web users view pages in an F-pattern: Eye-tracking studies show users generally focus their attention at the top left side of the main content area of the page. When there are links down the far left side, users tend to ignore them, at least at first, and go right to the main content. They read across for a few lines, forming the top crossbar of the F, then drop down and read across again, forming the second crossbar. The eye then tends to drift down the left side of the main content area of the page.

This is not to suggest that you need to arrange the content of every page in an F-pattern, but knowing how Web users tend to view your page, you might want to try to place the most important content in that top-left hot zone.

Follow the top-10 best practices

1. Write for the Web

- Keywords at the beginning of headings and sentences
- Short sentences
- Short paragraphs with spaces between them
- Get right to the point
- Use bulleted lists
- Don't copy directly from Word
- Use spell check and follow AP style
- Active voice is to be used ... (that was a joke)

2. Layering – Offer users a succinct overview of each content category, and invite them to click into it for more in-depth layers of information.

3. Linking – Use links in context, allowing users to go *deeper* into the content they're currently using, or to go *sideways* into related content, or *forward* to a logical next step, or even *backward*, when that also might be a logical next step.

Use meaningful words for links. Avoid "Click here" or "More" or "Continue." Instead, highlight a phrase that is itself an accurate description of the linked content.

4. SEO – Also known as search engine optimization. Structure content and write it so it can be found. Speak the user's language. The best thing you can do to make your content easier for search engines to find is to use keywords that match users' search queries. Use them in prominent places, like page titles, headings, first sentences and link text.

Other things you can do to increase the SEO value of your pages:

- use photos, and don't forget to fill in the alt text field
- include both internal and external links
- keep your content fresh (think departmental news and events)
- ask other sites to link to yours (especially .edu sites)
- post lots of content on inside pages (articles, reports, reviews, etc.)
- don't bother loading up the keyword field or creating invisible keywords.

5. Call to action – For undergraduate academic department’s, this could be an invitation to schedule a campus visit. Depending on the context, it could also be an “apply now” button or an e-mail link to ask for more information, or a “make a contribution” link, or a “sign up for alumni news,” etc. Wherever possible, give the user a way to take action.

6. Photos – Use relevant images that add information, not merely decoration. If you don’t have such photos, submit a photo request form asking the university photographer to shoot the photos you need. Here’s the link: <http://publications.cua.edu/photoform.cfm>.
Uploading overly large photos will slow down the load time of your page. Save photos at the size you plan to use them before uploading them to your Web page. If you don’t have access to photo editing software, try using www.picnik.com.
Also, please respect photo copyrights. *See Resources & References appendix for more information.*

7. The value of news – Consider adding departmental news and events to your homepage, if you have not done so already. Develop a nose for news. It doesn’t have to be a big deal to be worth a short news item on your website.

Examples of potential news items

- Books or articles published by faculty, staff, students or alumni
- New research projects involving someone affiliated with your department
- Updates about ongoing research projects (new participants, preliminary findings, etc.)
- Presentations at workshops, symposia, seminars by department members
- Newly hired faculty, staff, adjuncts or grad students
- Alumni accomplishments
- New courses being offered in the coming semester
- Any awards or other recognition for people affiliated with your department
- Upcoming events, speakers, guest lecturers, meetings
- Donations to the department
- Report the number new and transfer students who will be joining your department
- Any staff changes, reassignments, procedure changes, new departmental policies

8. Human element – If you can find a way to include a photo of a friendly, smiling student on your Web page, do it. Prospective students want to see if they will fit in with your department. If their 10-second impression of your website is all about buildings, courses required and intimidating blocks of text, they may not feel drawn to come here.
9. Google Analytics – You can find out how many users are coming to your site, where they're coming from, how long they stay, what content they click into and other useful information simply by signing up for a Google Analytics account. Send your gmail address or other Google login to Edward Trudeau to be registered as an analytics user.
See Resources & References appendix for more information.
10. Raise awareness in your school, department or office about the importance of your website.