

Proposal for the Maintenance and Upkeep of Departmental Websites

1. Executive Summary

Below the Technology Advisory Group (TAG) proposes a solution to the problem of maintenance of academic departmental websites. It has been noted that currently there are infrequent updates, significant non-uniformity, and a lack of aesthetics across these pages. This reflects poorly on the overall image of the University of Scranton as 50% of prospective students rate academic content on a school's website as the first priority. Additionally, most views produce "click-throughs" where the viewer proceeds to departmental websites. Thus, information that is missing or no longer relevant also reflects poorly on individual departments.

To solve this problem, we propose that the University hire a Web Content Specialist. We present two implementation options: minimal and ideal. While the two options differ, they have some elements that are similar. Below is a list of items which this person will be responsible for:

- Create, maintain, and communicate a timeline for updates so that all departments have the opportunity to add updates as communicated with the Web Specialist
- Coordinating with department chairs (and/or website contact persons) to determine necessary changes to the departmental websites.
- Minimizing the time and effort involved in routine updating of departmental websites by updating the website of each department.
- Presentation of content on departmental websites (unless the department wants to maintain this control).

The minimal implementation could be achieved by an individual trained in the CMS, and may require only 10-20 hours per week during the academic year. The ideal implementation would require the creation of a full time position for a skilled web developer with years of experience in both development and managerial roles.

The Web Content Specialist will NOT be responsible for:

- Personal web pages that are not outward-facing departmental websites. These include but are not limited to faculty pages, class pages, and catalog pages.
- Content decisions within departmental websites

The Web Content Specialist will also be available for additional services should departments want them.

These services include:

- Collaboration with departments to enhance content and presentation. Such content can include featured research, virtual tours, certification information, etc.
- Responsibility for all aspects of the development and design of the web presence, while the academic departments should be responsible for the content.
- Assistance to the faculty in writing appropriate descriptions and creating appropriate images to display such things as important departmental resources and/or service projects.

2. Charge

The group was charged by TAG to propose a process to better maintain and update academic departmental websites. The current process results in significant non-uniformity, a lack of aesthetics, infrequent updates, and significant imposition upon departmental resources responsible for maintaining the pages. This proposal seeks to ameliorate each of these impositions on the public image of The University of Scranton and to build a process that allows the creation of a website that enhances the brand and reflects the prestige of our campus.

3. Group Composition

The individuals drafting this proposal were a sub-group of members of TAG, with representation from each of the colleges, as well as staff representation from Public Relations (PR), Information Resources (IR), and the Center for Teaching and Learning Excellence (CTLE). The group members were:

Faculty Representatives

Teresa M. Conte, Nursing, Panuska College of Professional Studies
Kathleen M. Iacocca, Operations and Information Management, Kania School of Management
Sandy Pesavento, Education, Panuska College of Professional Studies
Jeremy Sepinsky, Physics, College of Arts and Sciences
Kevin S. Wilkerson, Counseling and Human Services, Panuska College of Professional Studies

Staff Representatives

James J. Franceschelli, Director of IT Services
Eugeniu Grigorescu, Director, CTLE
Lori J. Nidoh, Director of Marketing, Public Relations
Anne Marie Stamford, Assistant Provost for Operations, Academic Affairs

4. Proposed Solution

The proposed solution's justification as well as best practices recommendations for the upgrade and upkeep of the departmental websites are below. In the context of the scope of the solution, we envision two approaches: a minimal implementation and an ideal implementation. Both are detailed separately below. Before we present our solution, we first discuss the scope of the pages impacted by this proposal.

4.1 Scope

This proposal is targeted only at the outward-facing departmental websites, particularly those that are primarily created for informational, promotional, and recruiting purposes. This proposal purposefully does not include maintenance or upkeep for faculty pages, personal pages, or class pages. It does not reference or include the catalog pages. For example, [the physics website](#) would be covered by this proposed solution, while faculty pages would not be covered.

Further, this proposed solution is intended to minimize the time and effort involved in regular updating of one's departmental websites. All departments will retain full control of the content of their website. Departments wishing to maintain full control of both the content and presentation can also retain that control. This proposal intends to place the task of designing and implementing an effective and appropriate web presence for the departments into the hands of an individual trained and skilled in such presentation.

4.2 Minimal Implementation

There are two components to the minimal solution: a) a web content team; and b) an update timeline.

a) Web Content Specialist

From an informal survey of a sample of the faculty/staff responsible for updating the websites for their department, a common complaint was not that the Content Management System (CMS) was “difficult” to use, but simply that sporadic use of the system required the individual to re-learn the interface and commands each time updates needed to be made. Furthermore, these updates did not happen as regularly as one might hope. Departmental websites do not generally have a “last updated” date listed, but anecdotal evidence suggests many of the pages go 6 months or more without being updated. These sporadic updates are problematic for public relations and recruitment efforts, as well as generating unwanted overhead for those many individuals responsible for updating the page. Thus, we recommend a single person be responsible for implementing updates (as directed by department chairs/designated individuals according to a specific update timeline; see below) to the websites within the scope of their position campus-wide.

This individual, here identified as the Web Content Specialist, should, as part of their job description, be responsible for the following activities:

- Maintaining familiarity with the CMS;
- Creating and maintaining a timeline for departmental website updates (see below) consistent with, and dependent upon, the volume of such updates and the points during the academic year during which such changes are desirable;
- Contacting department chairs (and/or website contact persons) to solicit updates to their departmental websites;
- Updating the website of each department that requests a change during the window defined by the timeline;
- Distributing updates to CTLE TechCons who may be responsible for entering the updates into the CMS;
- Performing quality control on the TechCon updates, as well as publishing the updates made by the TechCons;
- Coordinating with department chairs (and/or website contact persons) to determine necessary changes to the departmental websites.

Once this system is in place and the timeline is in operation, we expect that the above-listed would require no more than 10-20 hours per week for the academic year. Thus, it is reasonable for such duties to be added to the job description of a current computer-savvy University of Scranton Employee.

b) Timeline

As mentioned above, we feel that it is important to create a timeline for updates to the website. This timeline should function as a set of “windows” throughout the year when updates to certain parts of the website are prioritized. The specifics of the timeline, as well as which sections of the website should be updated during which times of the year, should be decided by the Web Content Specialist in collaboration with the Technology Advisory Group and the Office of Public Relations (who are most knowledgeable about who uses the university website during which admissions periods).

The purpose of this timeline is to establish windows for departments to request updates to specific parts of their website. These windows will be open for a set period of time (established by the Web Content

Specialist) during which updates to a specific section of the departmental websites will be prioritized. Any updates to sections of the website outside of the section(s) with currently open window(s) will be updated only at the will of the Web Content Specialist, and will not be guaranteed until the window is opened for that section.

When a window is opened, it is the responsibility of the Web Content Specialist to contact the department chairs (and/or website contact persons) to alert them of the window and indicate which portions of the website should be investigated for updates. It will then be the responsibility of the department chairs (and/or website contact persons) to submit to the Web Content Specialist any updates to the website. It is further the responsibility of the department chairs (and/or website contact persons) to completely detail all of the needed updates, possibly in collaboration with the Web Content Specialist. The Web Content Specialist should not be responsible for the creation of content for the department, but should only be responsible for implementing the changes/updates requested by the department chairs (and/or website contact persons).

WINDOW EXAMPLE: Most new faculty begin teaching in August. Thus, it is important for the “Faculty/Contact Us” page (see, for example, [this page](#)) to be updated if any new faculty are hired. As such, it may be reasonable to set a window for updating the faculty information on any departmental website for the time period of August 1 through the Monday before classes begin. On August 1, department chairs (and/or website contact persons) will be contacted and asked to submit any updates to their department’s faculty information page. Any updates should be submitted to the Web Content Specialist before the final date. During this time, the Web Content Specialist will collect updates and will implement the requested changes, either by inputting them directly into the CMS or by making a specific request of the CTLE TechCons (which will need approval by the Web Content Specialist prior to “publishing”). If any new faculty are added outside of this window, or if any updates are submitted outside of this window, they may be implemented by the Web Content Specialist, time permitting, but will be prioritized below any update pertaining to whatever window is currently open.

Such a timeline should encourage departments to examine their website for information that may be out of date, incorrect, or inelegant. Regularly revisiting the same content, possibly by rotating members of the faculty in the department, can lead to more succinct, more elegant, more appropriate, and more useful ways to display information about the academic departments in the university. If there are no updates provided by faculty in that department, then no changes will be made.

4.3 Ideal Implementation

The minimal implementation, as described above, is the minimum that this group feels is needed to update the university’s departmental websites and maintain them at their current level of functionality and visual appeal. The Web Content Specialist described above needs few skills beyond those that can be acquired through training in the CMS. As noted by many, though, the current level of functionality and visual appeal is sub-optimal, and, in fact, is less modern, interactive, dynamic, or current than many of our peer institutions. See (list links to homepages of some peer institutions, with comparison websites from the U; include screen shots?). It is the opinion of this group that, if resources allow, the Web Content Specialist should be given greater control over the formatting and presentation of content created by departments and individual faculty. Furthermore, a sufficiently skilled Web Content Specialist would be able to work with academic departments and faculty to design new web spaces to showcase content created by the faculty. The ideal implementation of the Web Content Specialist role adds a number of other tasks, and, we feel, would warrant a full time position. Below, we list a number of tasks that a full time, skilled Web Content Specialist should be responsible. Additional duties should be determined in collaboration with

Administrative Affairs, the department chairs (and/or website contact persons), and Public Relations.

a) Ensure a uniform browsing experience

Currently, the experience of an external viewer on the websites under the scranton.edu domain, even with the existence of the CMS, is non-uniform. In the realm of the departmental website, the landing page is different for each department, which makes browsing and locating common information difficult. Such an experience can be jarring to prospective students and faculty exploring what our university has to offer. The current websites can be redesigned to follow a uniform structure using modern web tools. A skilled Web Content Specialist can use the CMS to the fullest extent of its abilities, as opposed to the current individuals responsible for updating the site, who, in many cases, only are able to use the most basic of tools. Initially, this responsibility would be to create a uniform browsing experience based on the current website design. Eventually, this responsibility may be extended to include enhancing the browsing experience across all departmental websites.

b) Collaborate with academic departments to enhance content presentation

While the faculty in our academic departments are very good at their job (teaching, research, and service), not all are skilled at promotion, presentation, and marketing. A skilled Web Content Specialist can work with academic departments to develop avenues to present departmental content in a modern, exciting, and attractive manner. This person should work with academic departments to discover content within each of the academic departments that does not currently have a sufficient web presence and help the department to create it. The Web Content Specialist is responsible for all aspects of the development and design of the web presence, while the academic departments should be responsible for the content. The Web Content Specialist should also assist the faculty in writing appropriate descriptions and creating appropriate images to display such things as important departmental resources and/or service projects.

c) Collaborate with faculty research groups to create/enhance presentation of research activities

Many faculty have excellent ongoing research projects and groups. But few have good a good web presence to promote those activities. In fact, the process for getting a faculty research group webpage is not straightforward nor well documented. The Web Content Specialist should seek out, and welcome contact from, faculty in departments across the university who are engaged in exciting research projects. These projects should be promoted at our university, and community outreach is an important component of research for all fields. These websites can be a very important part of the scientific outreach at our university, helping to attract students and faculty who see the high-quality work done by our faculty. The Web Content Specialist should collaborate with these faculty to design an appropriate web presence for their work, and should assist them in the continued updating and maintenance of such pages.

d) Maintain a clear communication channel between Academic Affairs, Departmental Faculty, and Public Relations

Each of the above-mentioned divisions at The University of Scranton have an important stake in having up-to-date, visually appealing websites. It will be the responsibility of the Web Content Specialist to communicate with each of these departments to ensure that the needs of each are met to the best of such a person's ability. The Web Content Specialist should inform faculty and Academic Affairs of the needs of Public Relations from a design and functionality perspective (after all, the website is most often used by individuals *outside* the university, not those inside). The Web Content Specialist should inform Public Relations of the material being generated for the faculty and Academic Affairs, as be well-informed about such material in order to understand the limits to which it can or should be used as promotional material for the university. Thus, the Web Content Specialist should be an open line of communication, and a knowledgeable source of information, for faculty, Academic Affairs, and Public Relations in order to create

the best web presence possible for the academic departments at the University of Scranton.

4.4 Administrative Recommendations

While this group does not feel that it is within its purview to impose administrative or financial requirements on this position, we will make a number of recommendations which we feel would be conducive to a successful implementation of this position, in either the ideal or the minimal manner.

- **The position should be in academic affairs.** Due to the extensive collaboration needed between faculty and this position, this group feels strongly that the position be house under Academic Affairs. This will make faculty feel more comfortable in dealing with this position, as well as help to ensure no website edits occur that will infringe upon the faculty's academic freedom. This position must take academic freedom into account in the creation of departmental websites, striving to work with faculty and departments to facilitate the most effective communication of a department's mission, identity, etc. into the web.
- **The position should be jointly funded.** Due to the extensive collaboration between the faculty/Academic Affairs and Public Relation/Admissions, as well as the potential use, development, and maintenance of the technical resources provided by Planning and Information Resources, this group recommends this position be jointly funded by all three divisions. Such a position would be a benefit to the university as a whole and would not serve any one division exclusively.
- **This position should not interfere with faculty administration of departmental content.** Certain faculty members currently have editing privileges to their department's website. This should in no way be removed. Faculty who wish to retain control of their website need to be able to do so. The presentation of such material for faculty can be considered teaching, scholarship, and/or service, depending on the discipline. Thus, such a professional outlet by faculty should not be infringed upon.
- **This position should take full advantage of university resources, such as the CTLE TechCons.** The TechCons, student workers in the CTLE who have often be responsible for assisting faculty in the development of departmental websites, will be an invaluable resource for this position. By giving the TechCons full privileges to make small edits, while reserving the permission to publish that content for the Web Content Developer, will free time in this positions schedule for other tasks. This position should include managerial experience in order to provide tasks for the CTLE TechCons and delegate editing/design duties to them. Thus, the ideal implementation of such a position can spend more time collaborating with departments to design avenues for content presentation, which the minimal implementation can spend more time with streamlining and organizing the editing and timeline process.

5. Justification

In addition to the reasons described above, the position would benefit the University of Scranton in the following ways.

5.a. Benefit to the University

In the last 12 months, our website has had 1,715,775 visits from 851,146 unique visitors and over 5,521,836 pageviews (excluding internal traffic). 47% of the visits were from new visitors.

In selecting a college, the experience a prospective student has on the college's website is the second most influential factor. Other recent findings from Noel-Levitz, a leading higher education consulting firm, reinforce the important role that a university's website plays in recruitment:

- About one-third of incoming freshmen and more than half of transfer students in fall 2012 were unknown to an admissions office before they submitted an application.
- More than 50 percent of students said the Web played a significant role in their decision to apply to a school.
- One in five students say that they have removed a school from consideration because they had a bad experience on an institution's website.
- Academic content on a school's website is the first priority for over 50% of prospective students.

Considering the role that the website plays in recruitment and the fact that it is our most read "publication" we need to ensure that our site has current content, presented in a way that is appropriate for the medium, considers usability and top tasks that people come to the site for, and reflects the most recent trends in web design and architecture.

By providing the necessary resources to enable the creation and maintenance of the appropriate web assets the University will provide visitors to our website with a consistent, high quality experience that will reinforce the prestige of our institution. Such a public image is vital for recruitment and admissions purposes. A well-presented, well-updated website can have an immediate effect on the quality of applications, and hence the incoming class.

5.b. Benefit to Faculty and Staff

Updated, current, and dynamic websites will allow Departments within the University of Scranton to highlight the strengths and uniqueness of their programs. Faculty will be able to showcase their accomplishments in and out of the classroom, and prospective students will be able to get a real sense of what each program has to offer.

By keeping faculty websites up-to-date, faculty can show other competitor schools their current research interests, as well as highlighting their accomplishments and promoting their standing in their field. Outreach has become a very important part of more professional research agendas, and a dynamic, updated, active website is a valuable tool to bring professional endeavors into the public eye.

Further, it is often extremely important for both current and future students to be able to easily find information that is relevant and required in their potential field. For example: when education majors are approaching graduation, they must apply to the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) for a Pennsylvania Professional Educator Certification. The process for such an application changes regularly. Such outdated information can be very harmful to the future of our current students, let alone our prospects for future students who might recognize outdated information being advertised as current. This information is continually changed by the state and therefore it is vital to be updated and current online for student access.

As a final point a web content specialist would be able to communicate effectively with departments to ensure that their site is accurate, up-to-date, and meets the campus' standards for web communications and ultimately allow faculty that currently update department web pages more time to do research instead of

web development.

6. Conclusion

Our group feels that the position described in Section 4 would be a tremendous boon to the University of Scranton. We feel that the effects of would be an immediate relief of the burden of website updates, freeing faculty and staff to do the jobs that they are more qualified to do. In the short-term, the websites created, updated, and enhanced by the person hired for this position would allow faculty to proudly point to the website displaying their professional accomplishments and activities, promoting the activities and interests of the University of Scranton to the broader community. In the long-term, a professionally designed website displaying the activities, interests, and research efforts of the academic departments will be an invaluable recruiting tool, attracting a higher caliber of students and faculty to open positions at the University of Scranton. We, of the Technology Advisory Group, strongly recommend the creation of a position as described by the Ideal Implementation (Section 4.3) of this proposal.