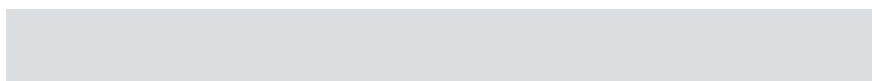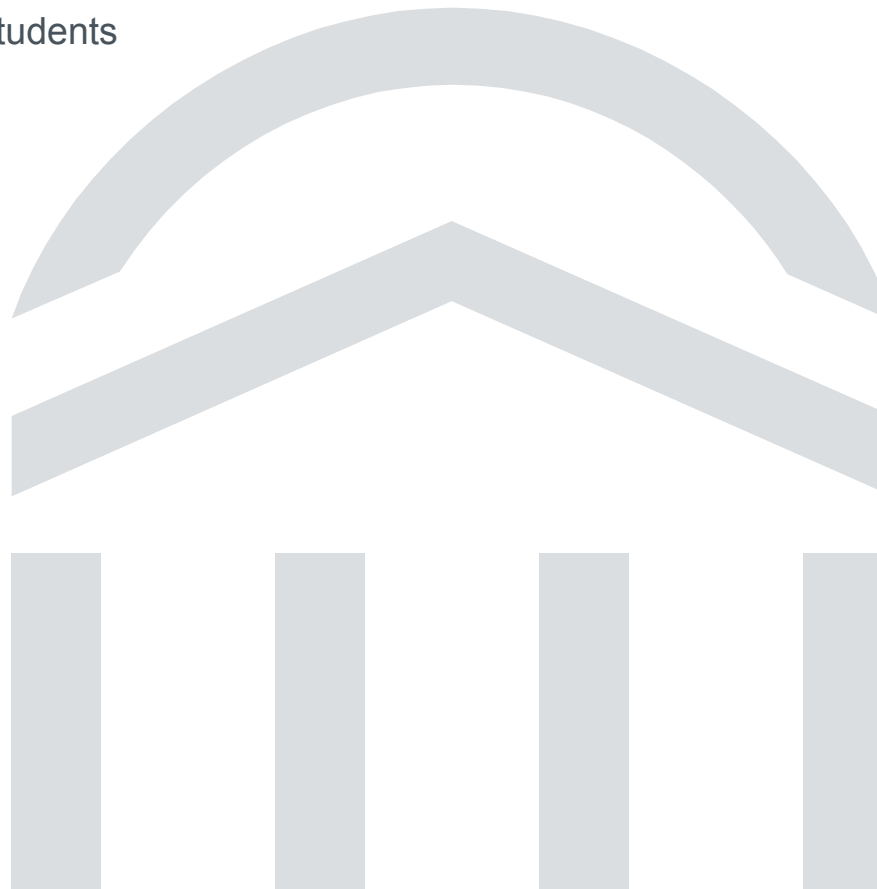# Mobile Site Optimization

Designing a Superior Experience for
Prospective and Current Students

COE Forum

Project Director
Carla Hickmam

Lead Consultant
Karishma Furtado

Contributing Consultants
Lisa Geraci

Katie Mangan

Managing Director
Melanie Ho

Design Consultant
Nini Jin

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About the COE Forum

Serving Continuing, Professional, and Online Education Leaders

Our Parent Firm: The Advisory Board Company

Founded in 1979 to serve hospitals and health systems, the Advisory Board Company is one of the nation's largest research and consulting firms serving nonprofit, mission-driven organizations. With a staff of over 2,300 worldwide, including 1,150 in Washington, D.C., we serve executives at about 3,000 member organizations in more than two dozen countries, publishing 150 major studies and 15,400 customized research briefs yearly on progressive management practices.

Our Broader Work in Higher Education: The Education Advisory Board

Encouraged by leaders of academic medical centers that our model and experience serving nonprofit institutions might prove valuable to colleges and universities, the Advisory Board launched our higher education practice in 2007. We are honored to report over 800 college and university executives now belong to one of our Education Advisory Board memberships.

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Academic Affairs Forum

Strategic advice for provosts to elevate performance in teaching, research, and academic governance

Student Affairs Forum

Research helping student affairs improve student engagement and perfect the student experience

Community College Forum

Strategic advice for community college leaders on improving finances and campus management

University Systems Forum

Research to help system executives understand the challenges their campus leaders face

Business Affairs Forum

Research and support helping CBOs improve administrative efficiency and lowering costs

Advancement Forum

Research and performance analytics for development officers to elevate fundraising performance

Information Technology Forum

Research for CIOs on leveraging information and technology to further higher education

Enrollment Management Forum

Research to support enrollment managers with recruiting, financial aid, and capacity management

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COE Forum

Breakthrough-practice research and market intelligence to help universities develop and grow continuing, professional, and online education programs

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Performance Technologies

University Spend Collaborative

Business intelligence and price benchmarking to help institutions better manage procurement and outside spend

**University Student Success Collaborative**

Predictive modeling and academic milestone tracking to help universities improve completion and time to degree

Community College Student Success Collaborative

Student support platform for college navigation and career pathing to help colleges improve graduation and employment outcomes

Unlimited Access to COE Forum Online Resources

Deriving Value from Your Membership
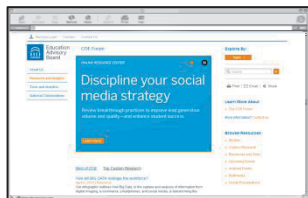
COE Forum members have full and unlimited access to the range of supplemental materials and implementation guidance on our website at eab.com/coe/.

Implementation Centers

Instant information access for deans and directors trying to "get smart fast" on major issues, task forces and strategic planning implementation teams adapting national best practice to local mission and budgets, and staff leaders executing specific projects.

- Breakthrough Practice Studies

- Practice Implementation Tools

- Centers include social media for marketing, student retention, and alumni engagement; strengthening and expanding online education

Real-Time Employer Demand Analytics

The COE Forum partners with Burning Glass, a Boston-based leader in human capital datamining, with unique artificial intelligence tools that mine millions of online job postings for real-time intelligence on titles, skills, and educational requirements in demand across the US.

- Real-Time Labor Market Dashboards

- Future Fields Reports

Over 350+ Market Research Reports

Archive of market research briefs completed on behalf of COE Forum members offer intelligence on national, regional, and local demand for programs across the portfolio.

Webinar Registration and Archive

Register for upcoming sessions or listen to archives. Many of our members convene their teams to listen to recordings and brainstorm ideas. Some titles include:

- *Industry Futures: Competency-Based Cybersecurity Pathways*

- *Winning in a Multichannel World: Optimizing the COE Website*

- *Charting a Path to Persistence: Strategic Interventions for Adult Learners*

Why We Care About Mobile

Now an Unavoidable Part of the Hyper-Connected Prospect's Search Process

Why We Care About Mobile

Now an Unavoidable Part of the Hyper-Connected Prospect's Shopping Process

In its ebook *Winning the Zero Moment of Truth*, Google makes the point that a prospect's journey today resembles a flight path—not a funnel. Prospects are touching down at different channels in every permutation of orders before they make a decision to buy—or not. On the one hand this new reality is exciting; marketers and recruiters have more opportunities to reach potential students. On the other hand, the abundance of channels is overwhelming and raises questions about where to invest limited resources and how to adapt strategies to each channel

TV **Print Media** **In-Person Event** **Friends and Family**

Tablet **Computer** **Mobile**
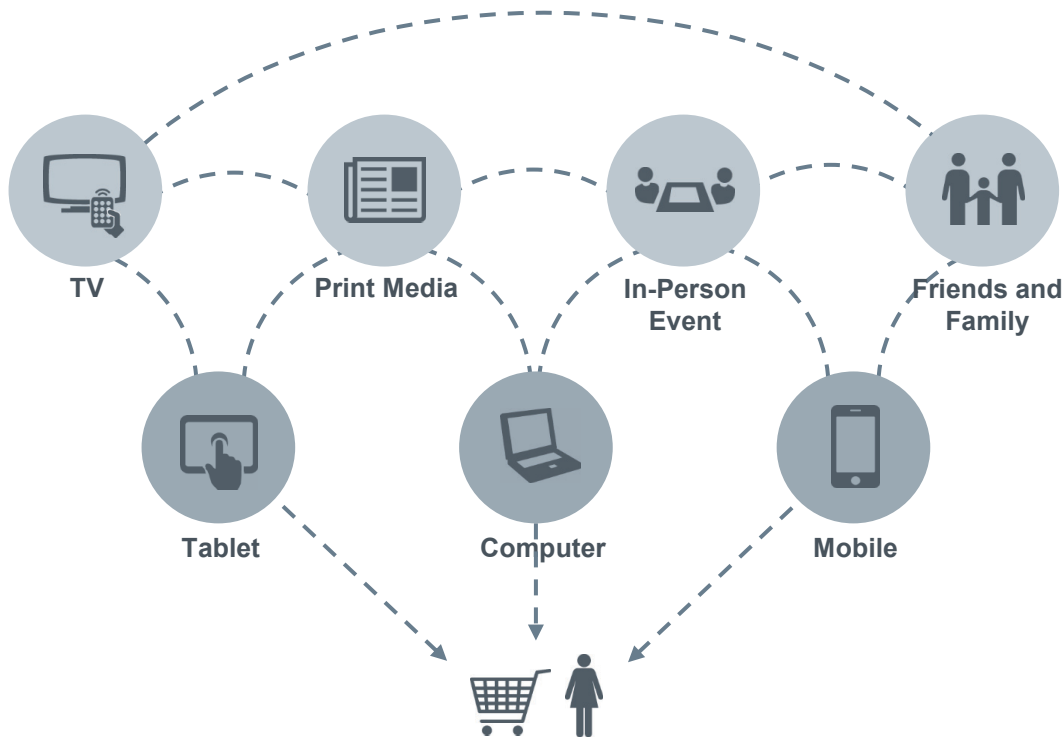
Different Devices Most Frequently Used Depending on Time of Day, with Smartphones the Most Common Starting Point

Morning	Daytime	Evening

Smartphone checked every hour from morning through evening

Mobile-optimized emails

Computer at work

Take advantage of larger screen

Tablet at night

Most time available to browse

90%
Use multiple screens sequentially to accomplish a task over time

65%
Searches started on a smartphone before continuing on a PC (60%) or Tablet (4%)
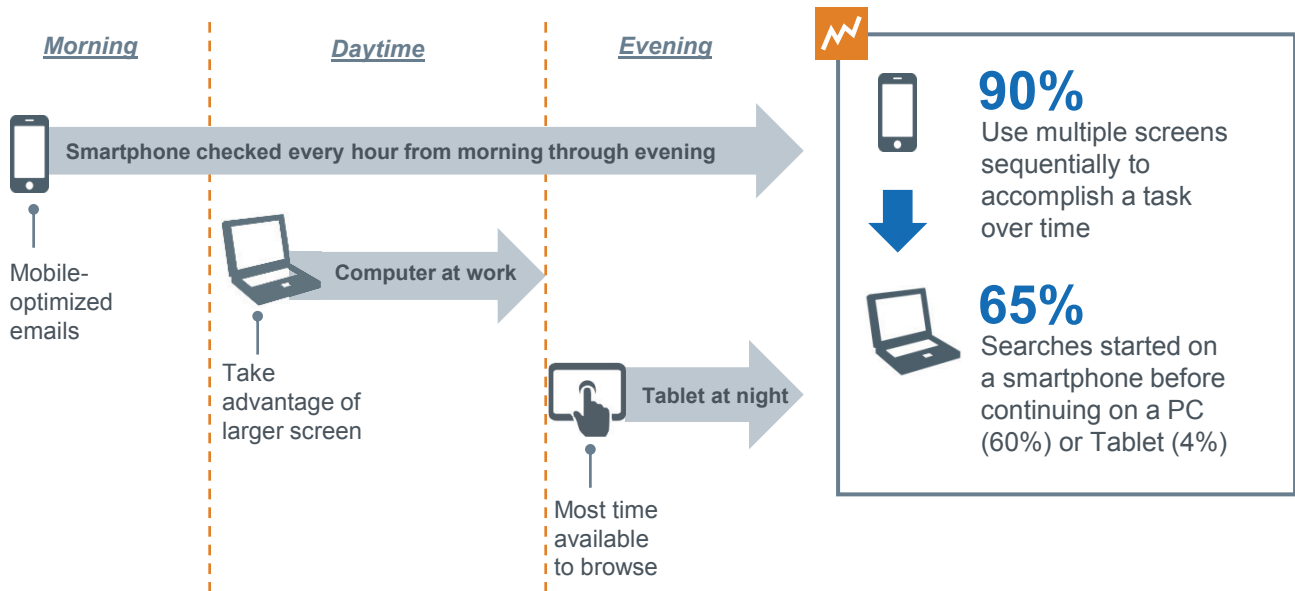
Marketers Catching Up to Multi-Screening as New Normal

Plugging into the channel-rich world prospects are now using to find and vet their potential purchases means understanding the nuances of these channels. Many COE marketing experts, for example, are finding that mobile is increasingly becoming the first port of call for prospective students. The easy, in-the-moment access provided by handheld mobile devices means that checking email, running a quick search, or browsing a website is never more than an arm's reach away morning through evening. A path that started out on mobile can easily transition to another device—a desktop when a prospect is at work and can enjoy the larger screen or a tablet in the evening when he has the most time to browse. This kind of "multi-screening" is the new norm: 90% of adults use multiple screens sequentially to accomplish a task over time and 65% of searches start on a smartphone before transitioning elsewhere.

Mobile-Based Web Traffic Growing Across Industries
Walker Sands Quarterly Mobile Traffic Report, June 2013

| Q1 2012	Q2 2012	Q3 2012	Q4 2012	Q1 2013
13.4%	16.6%	17.5%	23.1%	23.9%
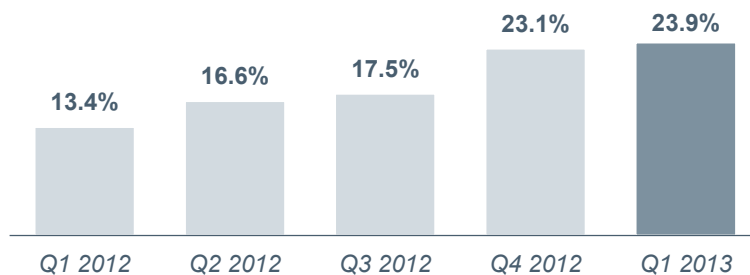
Source: Walker-Sands Quarterly Mobile Traffic Report, June 2013; EAB Interviews and Analysis

Similar Trends Witnessed in Continuing and Online Education

At one public institution's continuing education unit, 25% of web traffic was coming from mobile. This is probably on the high end, as this particular unit offers only non-credit products, which tend to receive more impulse attention than their more expensive and greater-time-commitment for-credit cousins. The point remains, though, that mobile traffic is unlikely to decrease anytime soon—regardless of portfolio composition. Google projects that 40% of education search queries will be on mobile devices by the end of 2014.

*Public University COE Unit Web Traffic from Mobile (October 2013)*

25%
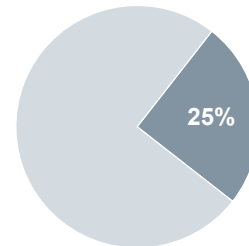
But Most Still Catching Up

If, at this point, you are growing anxious that you and your team are behind the times, don't worry: you're in good company. Most of us are still catching up. Our team did an analysis in late 2013 of 150 COE member websites looking for top mobile-optimization criteria like having prioritized, easy-to-navigate key information, being touchscreen friendly, and being readable on a small screen. Three quarters of the sites we visited were not mobile-friendly.

Mobile-Optimized COE Websites
n=150

Not Mobile-Optimized

25%
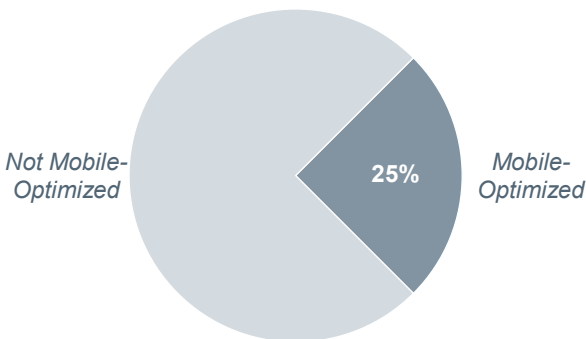
Mobile-Optimized

What Makes a Site Mobile-Optimized?

• **Prioritized, Easy-to-Navigate Content**—Key information (programs, contact info) easy to find quickly

• **Touch-Screen Friendly**—Buttons/links large enough for fingers to tap

• **Considerations for Small Screen**—Font size large enough to read without needing to zoom

• **Simplicity**—Less is more; most will continue exploration on another device

Source: EAB Interviews and Analysis

A Line in the Sand: Prospects First

At its core, a strong mobile website makes smart use of limited space. The COE Forum recommends that prospects—not current students, faculty, or alumni—should remain top of mind when designing a mobile website. Prospective students are particularly sensitive to a poor website-browsing experience. A revenue-dependent COE unit can't afford to push them towards competitors' websites with an over-populated mobile site that tries to be all things to all people.

As this publication will go on to explore, there are ways of encouraging non-prospects to quickly and painlessly self-direct to the appropriate corner of your website. But the focus of the website—at least upon first arrival—should be prospective students' needs and expectations.

A Wealth of Obstacles
Member-Reported Top Challenges Facing Mobile Optimization

#1: Waiting to Optimize Desktop and Mobile Simultaneously
#2: Need More Data on Prospect Browsing Patterns First
#3: Don't Have the Staff Time
#4: Requires Buy-In From Too Many Stakeholders
#5: Don't Have the Staff Expertise
#6: Waiting for the Rest of the Website to Change
#7: Need to Find the Right Vendor Match

Our Mandate: A Mobile Playbook

We would like to help you and your team get up to speed on mobile optimization within the COE space. Members told us they wanted to know:

- What content is most important to prioritize on a mobile site?

- What are the most critical metrics marketing leaders and other COE stakeholders should track to evaluate ROI and impact on enrollment strategy?

- What are the basic principles of mobile design?

- How will upcoming trends in web design affect mobile plans?

A daunting mandate, but one that we hope to deliver on with this mobile playbook. Through the use of case studies, content examples, and best practices identified by mobile practitioners inside and outside of continuing and online education, we hope the playbook will help get the ball rolling.

Source: EAB Member Survey

A Quick Note About Mobile: Many Paths to Optimization, One Dominant

The field of education has approached mobile optimization through four primary routes: mobile applications, parallel mobile sites (e.g., m.exampleu.edu), adaptive sites, and responsive sites. Each has had its time in the spotlight over the past several years. One is in the spotlight right now. Given that we cannot be everything to everyone—and that you wouldn't be best served if we tried—we have crafted this book with responsive web design as a preferred method of mobile optimization. This is not all that sensational a claim; responsive web design is, far and away, the golden child of mobile design. Below we outline the pros and cons of each option.

	Mobile Application	Parallel Website	Adaptive Website	Responsive Website
What Is It?	A computer program that must be downloaded to a smart device.	A separate website, that is highly optimized to accommodate mobile traffic.	A website that will change to fit a predetermined set of screen sizes.	A website that fluidly changes and responds to fit any screen size.
Pros	✓ Demonstrates content more creatively ✓ Tends to load faster	✓ Can retrofit with existing site ✓ Design tailored to mobile ✓ Content can be pared down	✓ Tends to load faster ✓ Can retrofit with existing site	✓ Easier to administer and maintain ✓ Future proof
Cons	✧ Limited content ✧ Must be actively downloaded ✧ Must be developed separately for each operating system	✧ Difficult to maintain ✧ Multiple URLs may confuse visitors	✧ Resource and budget heavy ✧ Difficult to maintain	✧ Tends to load slower ✧ Requires a redesign

While we believe responsive web design guarantees the greatest longevity and lowest maintenance for your mobile site, we also recognize that it requires a greater upfront investment than other options. Many of the recommendations in the pages that follow can also be applied to developing a parallel site, an adaptive site, or a mobile application.

Basic Principles of Mobile Design

Guidelines to Visually Organizing Your Mobile Site

- Five Principles of Mobile Design
- Staying Ahead of the Curve: Upcoming Trends in Mobile Web Design
- Top 10 Guidelines for Crafting High-Quality Copy

Basic Principles of Mobile Design

Guidelines to Visually Organizing Your Mobile Site

The field of mobile optimization is maturing and, while many acknowledge this with a growing sense of anxiety at being behind the times, it should also be a source of comfort. More so than when mobile was in its infancy, marketers and web designers today can tap into a wealth of insight into mobile design's best—and worst—practices. Organizations contemplating or refining a move into the mobile space are at an advantage because they can leverage these lessons learned by those that have gone before them.

The design principles summarized and exemplified here are inspired by and adapted from some of the most sophisticated mobile practitioners on the web including Microsoft, Apple, and Google. They aim to provide not so much a hard-and-fast, systematic design methodology as a set of design principles that have coalesced from the field thus far in light of changing modalities, user demands and expectations, and technological capabilities.

For advanced practitioners or those who like to stay on top of trends, we have shared some of the cutting edge practices in responsive web design.

Finally, we wrap things up with guidelines for writing and editing mobile content as well as a cautionary list of commonly made mistakes.

Up Ahead:

• Five Principles of Mobile Design

• Staying Ahead of the Curve: Upcoming Trends in Mobile Web Design

• Top 10 Guidelines for Creating High-Quality Copy

Five Principles of Mobile Design

1. Prioritize a Strong Homepage and Site Navigation

As we have said before—and will likely say again—mobile visitors are mission driven. Unlike your desktop homepage, which provides enough real estate to serve many purposes at once, your mobile homepage should focus on plugging visitors into the content they are most likely to want. In this section, we explore the principles for building a mobile homepage that gets users what they need, fast.

Keep the Spotlight on Calls to Action

It can be easy for mobile users to miss menu items, so always put your key calls to action where you know users will see them. Primary calls to action should be in the main body of the site and within clear view when a visitor first lands on your site (i.e., before he or she starts scrolling). Secondary tasks should be placed deeper in the site, either below the fold or through menus. By keeping secondary tasks out of the spotlight, you focus more attention on the primary tasks you want your visitors to complete. Determining what those calls to action should be will require some thought; they will probably be differ from a desktop website's calls to action.

Make the Road Back Home Clear

When mobile users navigate through your site, they want an easy way to get back to your initial homepage. Use your logo, typically situated at the top of any page, as a link to your homepage. Placing the link anywhere else—or failing to include one altogether—will frustrate your visitors.

Trim Menus

An extensive menu might work well for your desktop site, but mobile users won't have the patience to scroll through a long list of options. Consider how you can present the fewest menu items possible. Put yourself in the mind of your visitors—much of the terminology and taxonomy COE professionals like yourself use when thinking about different programs is unfamiliar and unhelpful to a prospective student. For example, a visitor may not know what a post-baccalaureate certificate is—or whether she is at all interested in one. She probably has a better sense of whether she is looking for a for-credit or non-credit credential or a professional certificate versus a degree.

2. Make Site Search Highly Visible and Easy to Use

Site search is vital for helping mobile users find what they're looking for in a hurry. This section offers tips for maximizing the value of your site's search.

Improve Intra-Site Search Visibility

Given the (potentially) long prospect funnel, the diversity of your visitors, and the ever-updating nature of websites these days, it is completely possible that visitors to your mobile site will not immediately spot the information they are in search of. They will usually turn to search, so you should make it easy to find. Muscle memory will probably draw their expectant eyes to the top right side of the screen, where search boxes reside on most websites. Place a clearly visible search function in this vicinity.

Ensure Search Results Are Relevant

Mobile visitors will not bother to swipe through multiple pages of search results. Instead, they will likely judge a site's search—and possibly determine to continue with your site (mobile or not)—based on the results it returned first, so make sure your first page of search results are the strongest. Program type, start date, time to completion, and academic discipline are all great filters to elevate.

3. Support the Multichannel Path to Conversion

The customer journey is getting more complex, and users expect to convert on their own terms. Drive conversions by putting your visitors in control.

Provide Click-to-Call Buttons for Complex Tasks

Offer a click-to-call button at points in the conversion process that require entry of complex or sensitive information. Most COE units agree that phone conversations with enrollment and/or recruitment staff were among their most compelling conversion levers. Your mobile site should organically facilitate such conversations.

Make It Easy to Finish Converting on Another Device

Multichannel and multimodal are the reality. Most of your visitors will not be faithful to one web-browsing device for obvious reasons: a mobile phone offers a set of conveniences appropriate for quick, in-the-moment checks, but a tablet may be a more comfortable option at home. Offer your visitors an easy way to save or share information across devices to keep users in your funnel. For instance, allow visitors to email themselves or download and save material to read and complete later and/or on a different device.

4. Make Forms Seamless and Simple

Whether it's registering for an event, purchasing a course, or submitting a request for more information, your user's conversion experience should be as seamless as possible.

Simplify Information Entry

Visitors have come to expect certain small conveniences in the form completion process. The presence of such features does not necessarily win you points, but their absence will probably lose you some. Users expect automatic number forms for numeric fields, automatic advancing through fields, and calendars. When possible, autofill information.

Don't Forget to Offer a Helping Hand

Use click-to-call or email prompts generously. Whenever possible attach an individual staff person's name to a phone number and/or email address. Visitors should feel supported throughout their shopping process. Moreover, encouraging them to reach out is an opportunity to build a one-on-one relationship sooner rather than later.

5. Keep Mobile Form in Mind

Mobile users will notice and be delighted by the small things you do for them to enhance their experience. This section discusses how to design your entire site to account for mobile's form factor and unique user needs.

Avoid Too Many Jumps Between Optimized and Non-Optimized Website Sections

Unsurprisingly, visitors will have a much easier time navigating mobile-optimized sites than trying to navigate desktop sites on mobile devices. However, sites that include a mix of desktop and mobile-optimized pages may actually be harder for visitors to use than all-desktop sites. If a partial deployment is necessary, try to work in the compartments that capture most if not all of the pages a "typical" visitor will spend time on to minimize the jarring transition from optimized to non-optimized parts of the site.

Don't Make Users Pinch to Zoom

Sites that require visitors to zoom in or out are problematic for two reasons. First, visitors will probably grow frustrated, and second, they may miss important messaging and calls to action. Design your mobile site so that users won't ever need to change the size. Some mobile sites even disable pinch to zoom on their screens—if your site is designed correctly, users will never notice it's gone.

Tell Users Which Screen Orientation Is Best

Visitor will likely stay in the same screen orientation until something prompts them to switch, like trying to read small type or watch a video. Either design for both landscape and portrait, or encourage users to switch to the optimal screen orientation—but make sure your important calls to action can be completed even if they ignore the suggestion to switch.

Keep Users in a Single Browser Window

Switching between windows on a smartphone can be troublesome and raises the risk that visitors might not find their way back to your site. Try to keep users in one place by avoiding calls to action that launch new windows.

Avoid "Full Site" Labeling

The "full site" label is commonly used to offer visitors the option of continuing their searching and browsing on the desktop site. This is a fine option, but it should not be pushed as a better ("full") one. The desktop site is not mobileoptimized and the full content it offers may end up frustrating your visitor. Using terms like "desktop" instead of "full" can help avoid this.

Biggest Mobile Missteps

Your unit serves a diversity of stakeholders—prospective, current, and past students, community members, faculty members, and the like. But none of these groups is well served by a homepage that attempts to speak to them all. Your mobile website should be a marketing and recruiting lever first and foremost. To put it bluntly, you can afford to (slightly) inconvenience other stakeholder groups, but you should avoid inconveniencing prospective students. The following are common reasons prospective students find homepages frustratingly hard to navigate:

✖ *Lack of organization*: visitors have to keep scrolling and clicking.

✖ *Unfamiliar organization*: menus are broken into categories that use foreign jargon (e.g., post-baccalaureate, hybrid courses, etc.).

✖ *Non-mutually exclusive menu items*: users see links that appear repetitive (e.g., noncredit certificates versus professional certificates).

✖ *Vague menu items*: menus contain categories that are too abstract to be meaningful. For example, the link on one homepage to "business and technology" could have led to academic programs in those areas, to finance and administration pages, or to content for business and technology-related community organizations or employers.

✖ *No calls to action*: visitor momentum wanes because they are not asked to provide valuable information and don't perceive a sense of progress.

✖ *Never-ending pages*: excessive scrolling leads visitors to lose interest or miss important links and messages.

Staying Ahead of the Curve

Upcoming Trends in Mobile Web Design

Members often ask as us for a glimpse into the future. They want to know where they should invest limited resources in order to stay cutting edge. When it comes to web design, it can be helpful to look outside of higher education for a better understanding of where the discipline is going. At the same time, however, looking too far away at sites developed by for-profit companies can give us a skewed sense of what is possible—and important—for higher education sites. To strike a compromise, we have looked at several dozen not-for-profit organizations' websites to the trends likely to influence higher education and COE units.

For those with a responsive site, these trends can be food for thought as you continue to revise and optimize your site. For those about to invest in mobile design, these trends can help shape plans. Regardless of where you are in the responsive redesign/retrofit process, reviewing your site design regularly and keeping abreast of major design trends will help your brand stay current and competitive and will ensure your website is driving results you want.

Up-and-Coming Trends:

1. Flat Designs

2. Unique Typography

3. Large Photos/Unique Imagery

4. HTML5/CSS3 Animations/Transitions

5. Navigation Cards

6. Video

#1. Flat Designs (Decluttered Screens)

Flat design refers to the design aesthetic that prioritizes functionality over style. Instead of graphical user interfaces that attempt to imitate their real-life analogues (e.g., the iPad newsstand) complete with extra details like beveled edges, gradients, shadows, and reflections, flat interfaces go a decidedly more two-dimensional (i.e., "flat") route that plays to the strengths of digital interfaces.
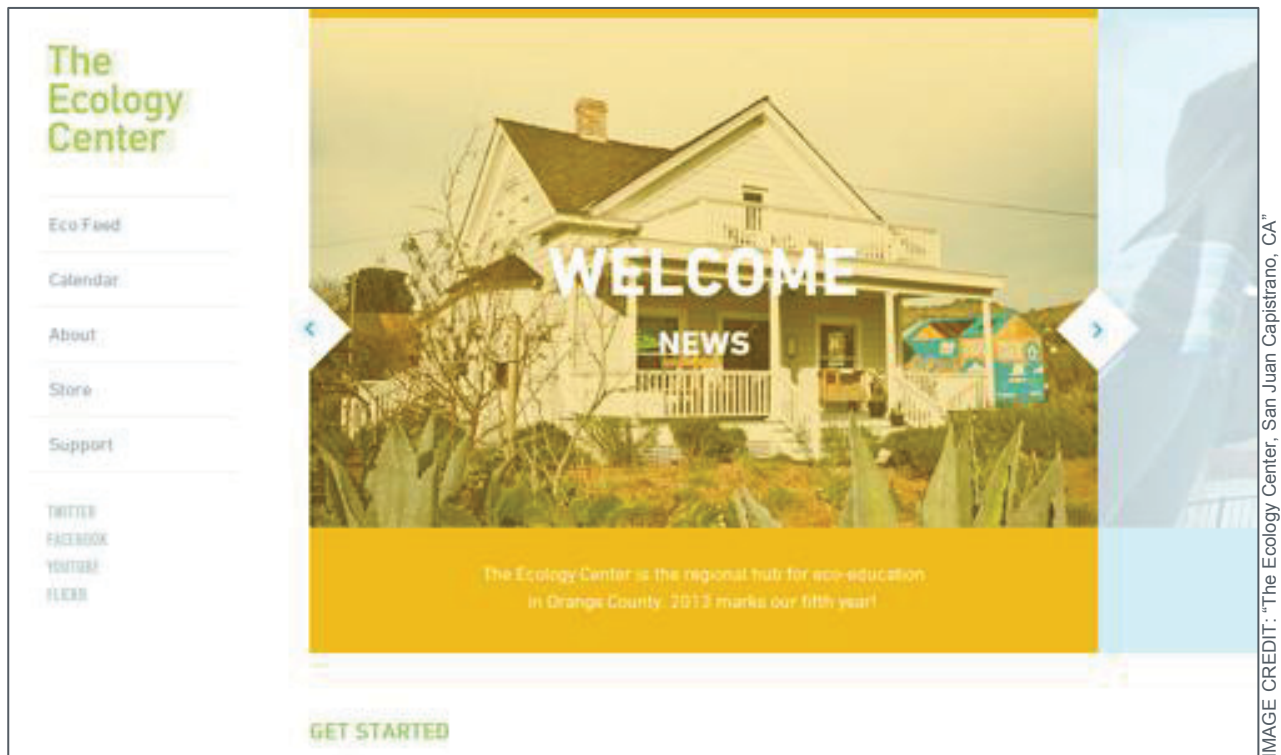
IMAGE CREDIT: "The Ecology Center, San Juan Capistrano, CA"

For more examples of flat design, see:
http://fltdsgn.com/
http://www.webdesignrazzi.com/2014/flat-websites-examples/

#2. Unique Typography

First impressions are lasting impressions. Whether you realize it or not, your typography helps to create an experience for users before they've even read a word or clicked a button. Font creates an atmosphere and elicits a response much the same way as tone of voice does. Typography establishes a mode of communication and, in turn, the personality of the website. The choice of typeface will determine how people respond to your website.

For more example of unique typography, see:
http://www.awwwards.com/websites/typography/
http://www.intechnic.com/blog/top-50-best-examples-of-websites-using-typography/

#3. Large Photos/Unique Imagery

When it comes to web design, the phrase "a picture is worth a thousand words" couldn't be more accurate. In essence, we have come to prefer the brevity and beauty of images over words. It's these calls for quick and easily consumable content that have prompted the rise of sites like Instagram and Pinterest.

Images on a webpage focus visitor attention on key messages; newspapers and magazines have been leveraging this for years. Strategically placed images can set a tone in a way words cannot.
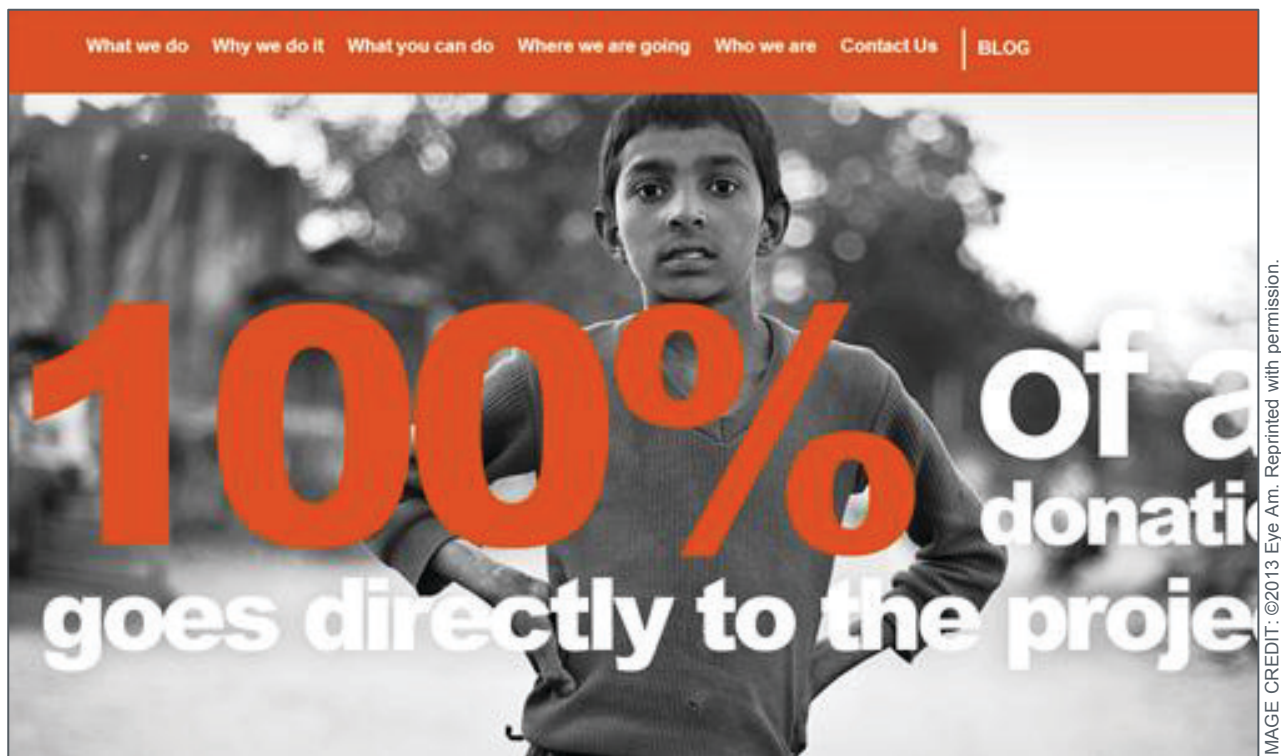
IMAGE CREDIT: ©2013 Eye Am. Reprinted with permission.

For more examples of websites with large and/or unique imagery, see:
http://designinstruct.com/visual-inspiration/web-design-inspiration/websites-beautiful-large-photo-backgrounds/
http://speckyboy.com/2013/05/27/advantages-of-designing-big-oversized-website-layouts/

#4. HTML5/CSS3 Animations/Transitions

Flash is no longer the bane of the internet's existence. Thanks to HTML5, CSS3, and new Javascript techniques, users can now view animations on mobile devices. These advances also allow for novel transitions, such as hovering a mouse over a button to see the button change color.

This clean and simple one-page poll from the Australian Red Cross attracts visitors attention with a short page and flat design, but buttons that change color when hovered on.

For more examples of CSS3 animations, see:
http://www.creativebloq.com/css3/animation-with-css3-712437
http://css3.bradshawenterprises.com/

Source: ssssss

#5. Navigation Cards

When an organization has too much information to convey in a single homepage, condensing information into cards makes effective use of limited space. Cards (boxes of information) are usually linked to another page that contains more information. Some designers keep cards as color and text only, while others include photos or graphics
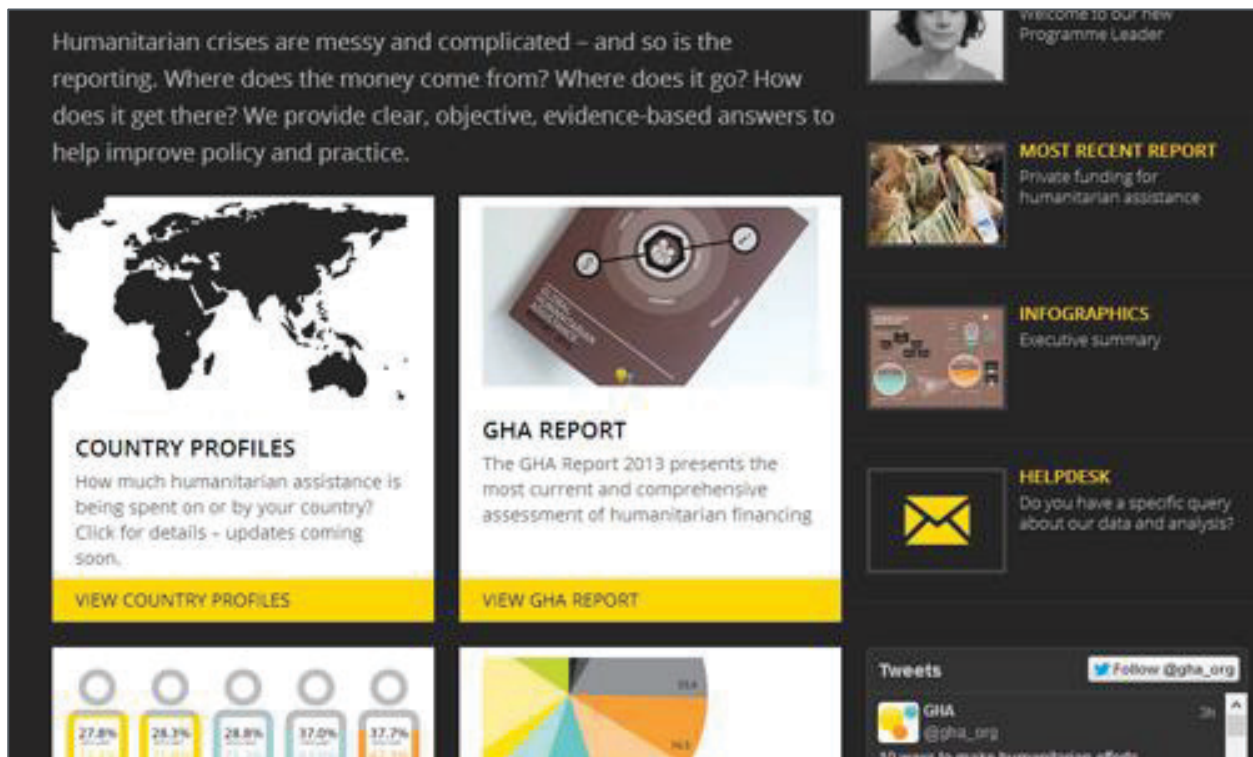
The Global Humanitarian Assistance website neatly organizes its resources on cards that contain both graphics and text.

For more examples of the use of information boxes or cards, see:
http://inspirationti.me/websites/boxes

#6. Video

Since its early days, video has been one of the most powerful and efficient tools of visual communication. IVideos have become quite popular in the field of education and only become more so as web designers come up with new, creative ways of using them.

This Into the Arctic website has a full screen video on the homepage that loads automatically.

For more examples of videos integrated into web design, see:
http://line25.com/articles/20-web-designs-with-stunning-video-backgrounds
http://www.onextrapixel.com/2013/04/26/40-effective-examples-of-website-design-using-full-screen-video/

Top 10 Guidelines for Crafting High-Quality Copy

Here's a summary of guidelines to use when you revise your content for mobile. These recommendations apply regardless of platform or channel. Mobile is just a useful constraint.

1. **Plain language:** Use shorter, simpler words. Write short sentences and avoid convoluted sentence structure.

2. **Objective language:** Neutral language is easier to read and more credible than marketing fluff. Use words your user will know, not jargon.

3. **Be concise:** Aim to get your main point across on a single screen, which is approximately 100 words. Ruthlessly delete unnecessary words. (That doesn't mean all anyone will read is a single screen—but it provides a helpful editing guideline.)

4. **Write headings as links:** Assume that headings and sub-headings could be repurposed as navigation. Make them actionable and fill them with trigger words—words that users themselves would say if asked to describe what they're looking for.

5. **Write the first sentence as a summary:** Assume that the first line of the page or section could be repurposed as a navigation summary. Put the main idea and important keywords in the first sentence.

6. **Inverted pyramid:** Don't bury the lede. Start with the conclusion. Put the most important ideas first. Bottom line up front (BLUF).

7. **One topic per paragraph:** When readers scan the page, they look at initial sentences for main ideas. If additional ideas are presented in a single paragraph, users are likely to skip over them.

8. **Highlight keywords:** Readers scan for hyperlinks in text, so this is a particularly effective way to highlight. You may also bold keywords, but avoid color variations or underlining words that aren't hyperlinks.

9. **Educate your copy writers***: Many of your stakeholders will be unfamiliar with mobile best practices. As a result, you may encounter resistance and knee-jerk reactions, which are usually rooted in fear of not understanding how and why mobile is different. Use lots of best practice examples from other mobile websites and apps to make your point.

10. **Give content authors templates***: If you have a vision of the type of content that should go on each page, encourage your content authors to adhere to it by providing templates.

Mobile
Content Gallery

Examples of High-Impact Mobile Content and Resources

- Features for Prospective Students
- Features for Current Students
- Features for Past Students
- Anatomy of a Best-in-Class COE Mobile Homepage
- Optimizing Program Menu Design

Content Gallery

Examples of High-Impact Mobile Content and Features

Regardless of whether they are future, current, or past students, mobile visitors to your site share one common feature: they have a goal in mind and are using mobile to accomplish it. Effective mobile sites reflect these goals. This section of the mobile playbook presents examples of some of the smart content and features we encountered as we perused countless COE mobile sites. Findings are organized according to the student group (prospective, current, or alumni) that will likely find them most useful.

Prospective Students

1. Click-to-Call Links
2. Shortened RFI Forms
3. Mobile Registration
4. Prospect-Optimized Homepage
5. Cross-Channel Mobile Links
6. Filtered Search
7. Testimonials
8. Summary Boxes
9. Compelling Calls to Action
10. Maps

Current Students

1. All-in-One Homepage
2. Subscribable Calendar
3. Filterable Calendar
4. Easy-Access Tech Support
5. Easy-to-Spot Student Portal
6. Quick Links Grab Bag

Alumni

1. Efficient Event Registration
2. Transcript Requests
3. Faculty and Staff Directories
4. Easy Mobile Giving
5. Personalized Giving Portals
6. Mobile Community

After introducing the abovementioned content examples, we double-click on the optimal makeup of two critical pieces of all COE mobile websites: the homepage and the program menus.
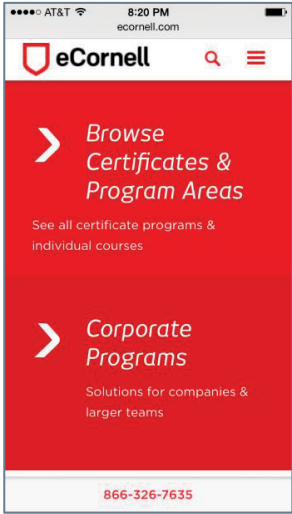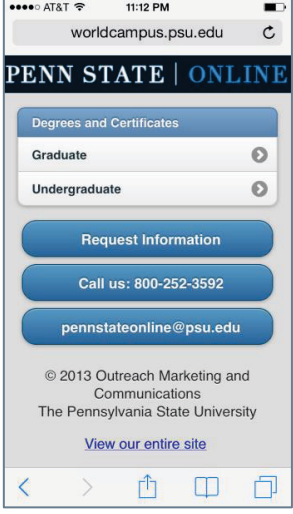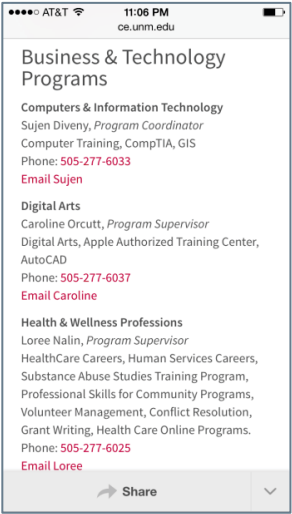
- Anatomy of a Best-in-Class COE Mobile Homepage
- Optimizing Program Menu Design

You'll find, however, that many of these features appeal to multiple audiences and as such may be good candidates for first investment.
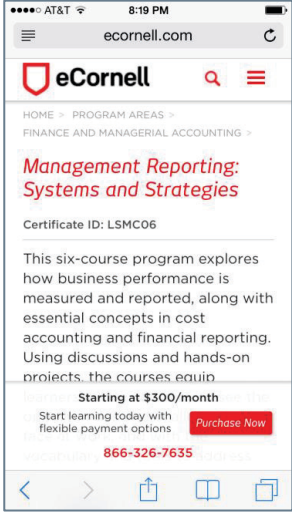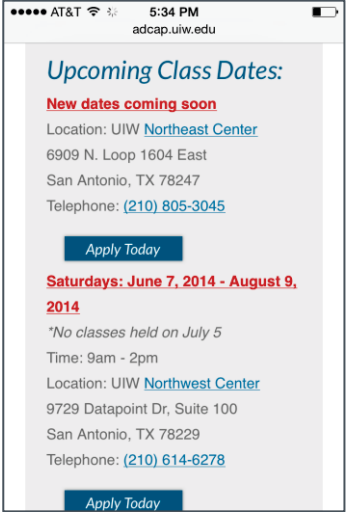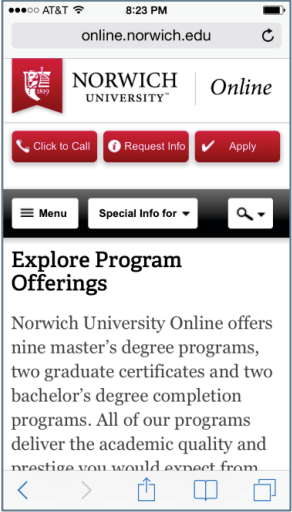
	Student Population		
	Prospective	Current	Past
Click-to-Call Links	O	O	O
Shortened RFI Forms	O		
Mobile Registration	O		
Prospect-Optimized Homepage	O		
Cross-Channel Mobile Links	O	O	O
Filtered Search	O		
Testimonials	O		
Summary Boxes	O		
Compelling Calls to Action	O		
Maps	O	O	O
All-in-One Homepage	O	O	O
Subscribable Calendar	O	O	O
Filterable Calendar	O	O	O
Easy-Access Tech Support		O	
Easy-to-Spot Student Portal		O	
Quick Links Grab Bag	O	O	O
Efficient Event Registration	O	O	O
Transcript Requests		O	O
Faculty and Staff Directories	O	O	O
Easy Mobile Giving		O	O
Personalized Giving Portals		O	O
Mobile Community			O

Features for Prospective Students

Click-to-Call Links: Providing Immediate Access to a Recruitment Advisor
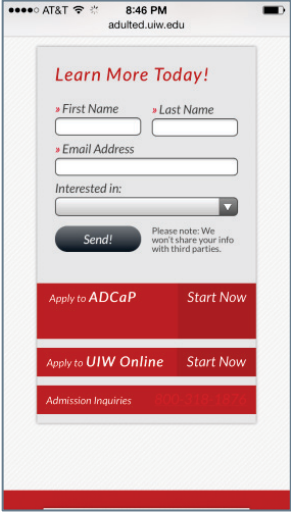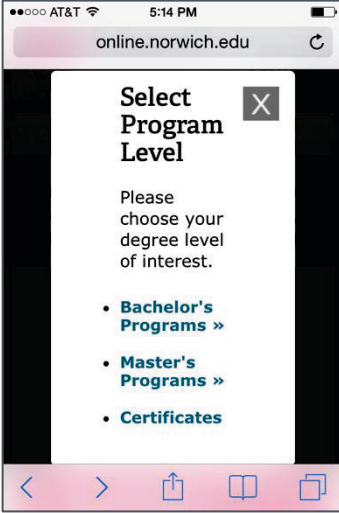
Clickable phone number in a consistent, easily noticed location *(eCornell)*	Button draws attention and encourages visitors to call *(Pennsylvania State University)*	Clickable directory with contact info for each academic program *(University of New Mexico)*

Mobile Registration: Mobile Leaders Prioritizing Shopping Cart Functionality
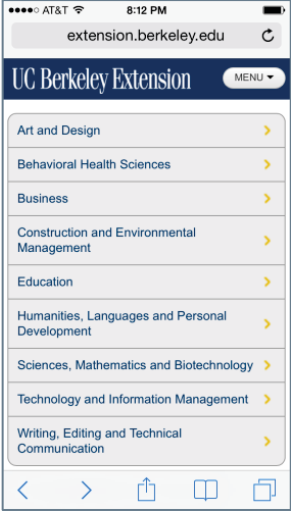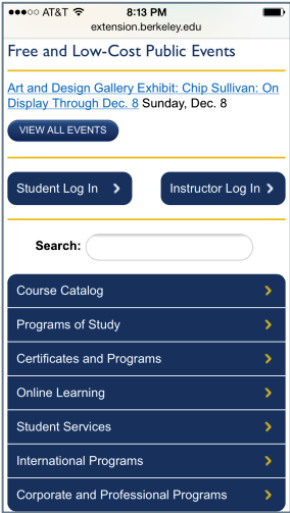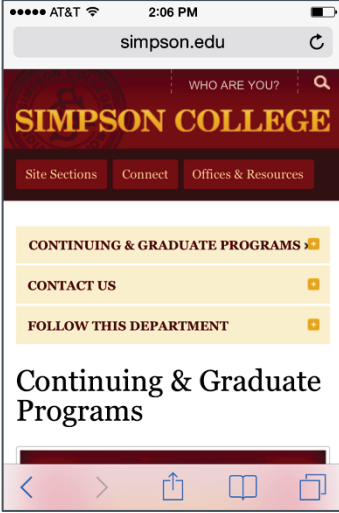
Ability to purchase on mobile site especially important for non-credit *(eCornell)*	Individual classes have a shorter decision cycle and are easier to commit to via mobile *(University of the Incarnate Word)*	Option available for degrees, though most prospects likely to switch to desktop *(Norwich University)*

Shortened RFI Forms: Getting Data to Remind Prospects to Visit Later
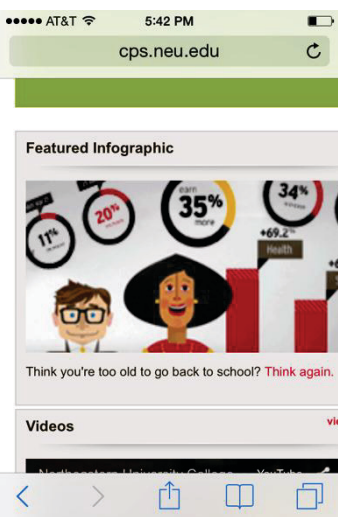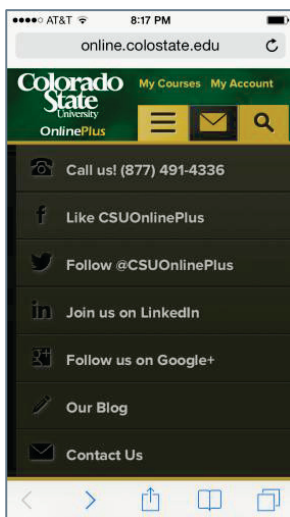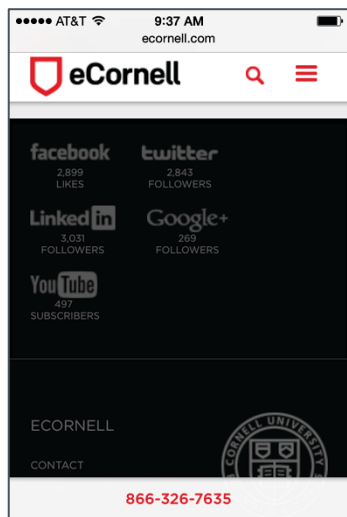
| Shortened RFI form *(University of the Incarnate Word)* | Short form to facilitate future purchases, especially among repeat students *(University of California, Berkeley)* | Quick filter question en route to RFI allows for shorter form *(Norwich University)* |

Prospect-Optimized Homepage: "All Things to All People" Approach Unlikely to Achieve any Single Business Goal
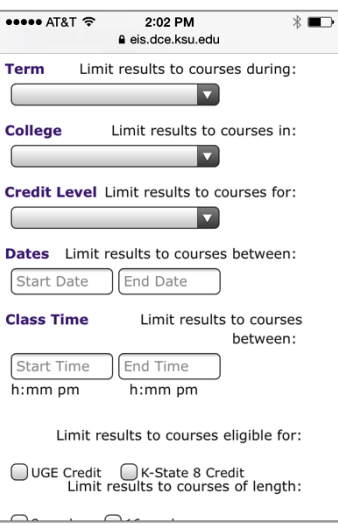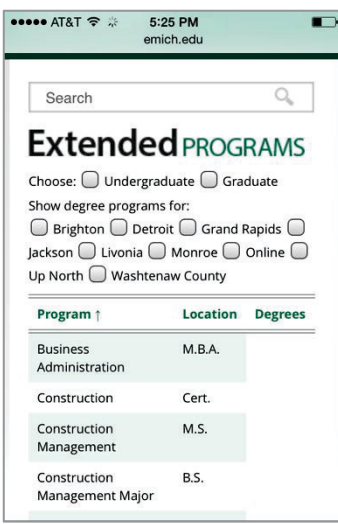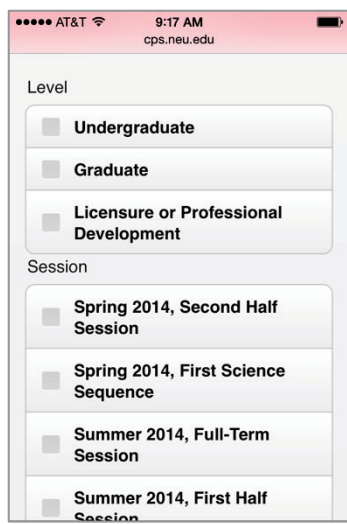
| Academic program areas front and center—no lengthy navigation required *(University of California, Berkeley)* | Create separate log-in for students so that main site can focus on prospects *(University of California, Berkeley)* | Cater primarily to prospective students, but allow others to find what they need through the "who are you?" menu *(Simpson College)* |

Cross-Channel Mobile Links: Students Accustomed to Using Mobile for Social Networking and Video
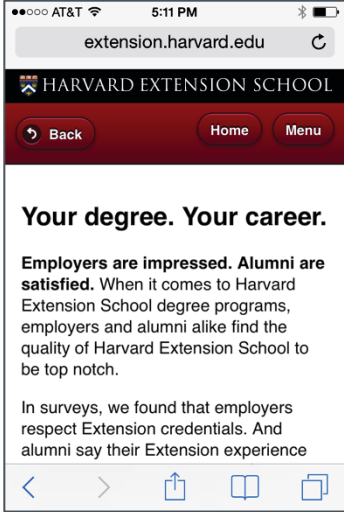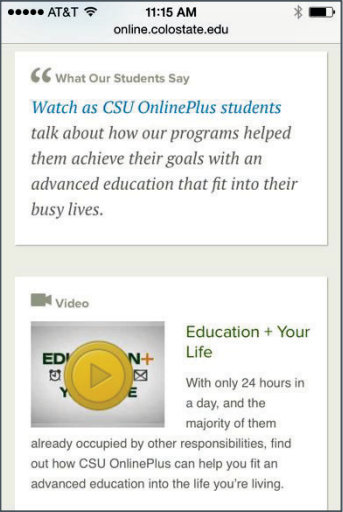
Creative content (featured infographic) appeals to browsers *(Northeastern University)*	Wide array of channels included in the contact menu instead of being relegated to the footer *(Colorado State University)*	Social media popularity indicators offers "people like me" nudge *(eCornell)*

Filtered Search: Help Students Find What They Need Fast

Search can be limited by a wide array of criteria from term to time of day to length *(Kansas State University)*	Radio buttons provide easy limitation criteria *(Eastern Michigan University)*	More limited restriction criteria ensures searches are not overwhelmed at the outset *(Northeastern University)*
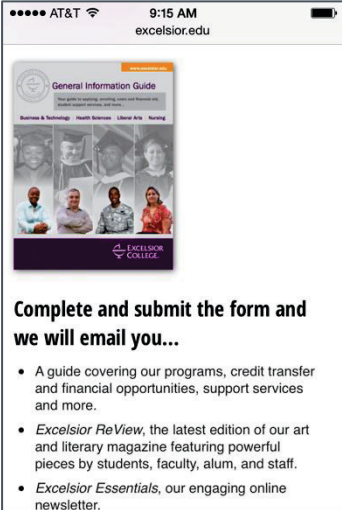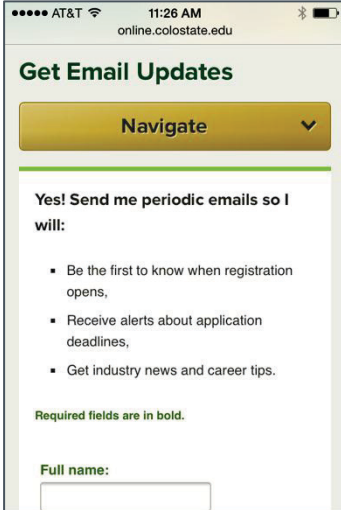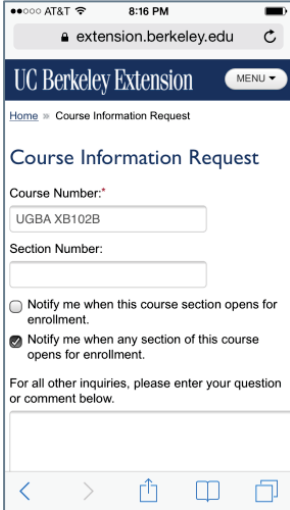
Testimonials: Tell a Powerful Story Unobtrusively

Testimonials from employers and alumni showcase opinions of "people who matter" *(Harvard University)*

Multimedia testimonials further down homepage highlight current students' experiences *(Colorado State University)*

Blog posting from graduating student featured on the homepage is approachable and accessible *(Simmons College)*
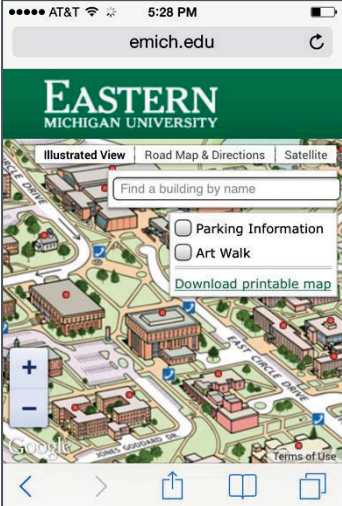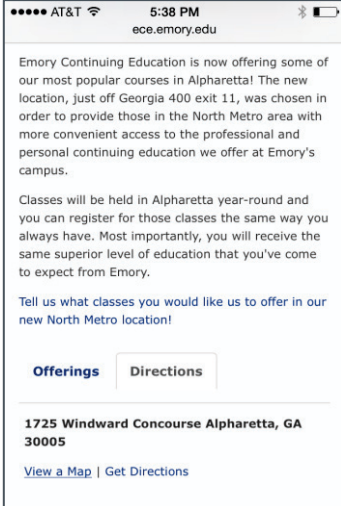
Summary Boxes: Don't Bury the Lead

Brief plain-text summary outlines key elements of program *(University of Northern Kentucky)*

One table summarizes what would have taken far more text to explain in a paragraph *(San Diego State University)*

Attractive and streamlined table makes the basics clear *(Northeastern University)*

Compelling Calls to Action: Consider Mobile-Specific Goals and Incentives for Completing Them

Prospects know what they get if they complete the form
(Excelsior College)

Form facilitates sign-up for email updates
(Colorado State University)

Course-specific RFI appeals to prospects who don't want generic "spam" from the institution
(University of California, Berkeley)

Maps: Help Your Future Students Find You

Interactive, attractive map appeals to a diversity of audiences due to its many features including search by building name and parking information (Eastern Michigan University)

Map and direction links at the bottom of program pages ideal for browsers investigating programs at satellite locations
(Emory University)

Simple, clean menu branching from homepage provides three straightforward options including one that visitors are familiar and comfortable with – Google
(Simmons College)
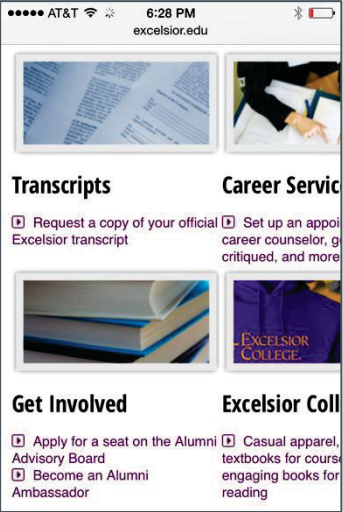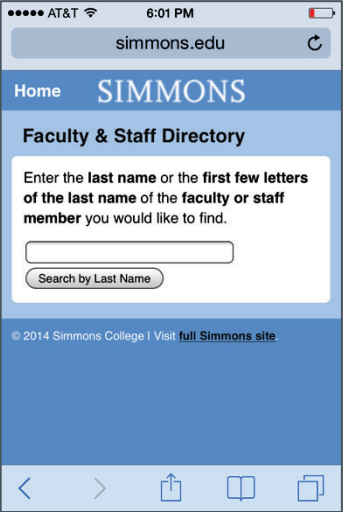
Source: Colorado State University, online.colostate.edu; Eastern Michigan University, emich.edu; Emory University, ece.emory.edu; Excelsior College, excelsior.edu; Simmons College, simmons.edu; University of California, Berkeley, extension.berkeley.edu.
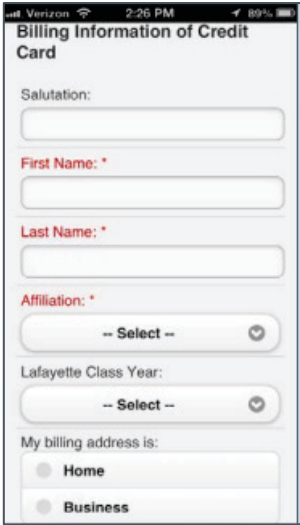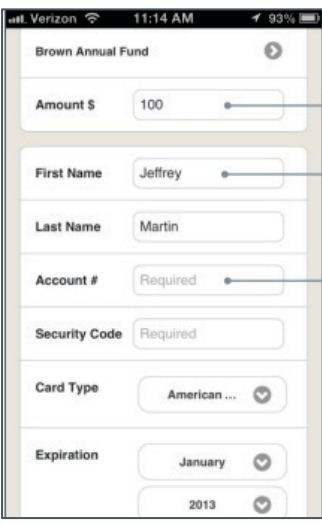
Features for Current Students

All-in-One Homepage	Subscribable Calendars	Filterable Calendars
Links to email, LMS portal, calendar, directories, and desktop site all in one clean interface *(University of Minnesota)*	Students can subscribe to the academic calendar for advance and just-in-time notice of important deadlines and events *(Harvard University)*	Bustling events calendar can be filtered by social and academic happenings *(Simpson College)*

Easy-Access Tech Support	Easy-to-Spot Student Portal	Quick Links Grab Bag
Contact information for in-the-moment support featured prominently *(Norwich University)*	Though the mobile site doesn't focus on current students, they can easily find what they most likely need (the student portal) on the homepage *(Excelsior College)*	Catch-all list of "Quick Links" is easy for current students with sundry needs to explore *(Bellarmine University)*

Features for Past Students

Efficient Event Registration	Transcript Requests	Faculty and Staff Directories
Short form allows alumni to quickly register for upcoming events (*Excelsior College*)	Transcripts can be requested at the click of a button easily found on the alumni homepage (*Excelsior College*)	Alumni looking to stay in touch can do so using a directory only one click away from the mobile homepage (*Simmons College*)
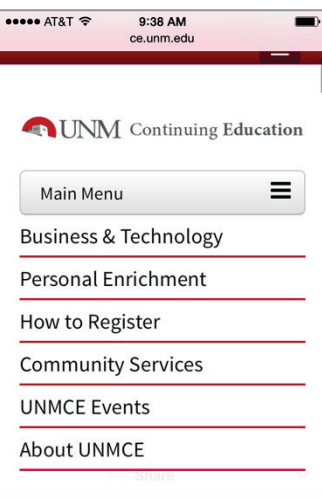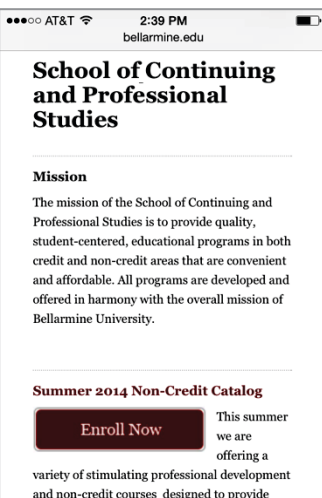
Easy Mobile Giving	Personalized Giving Portal	Mobile Community
Simple form encourages in-the-moment donations in response to appeals (*Lafayette College*)	Partially prefilled form facilitates express giving (*Brown University*)	Mobile community for alumni keeps graduates engaged and contact information up to date (*Eastern Washington University*)

Anatomy of a Best-in-Class COE Mobile Homepage

First impressions matter: this is particularly true of mobile sites that cater to the shorter attention spans of mobile users. Your mobile homepage must indicate to visitors that they can find what they are looking for and that they will like what they find. This section of the playbook will help you meet the twin mandates of homepage function and form by providing you with a summary of common homepage layouts, results of a census of over 30 COE homepages, and a list of commonly made homepage design and content mistakes.

Three General Homepage Layouts

Layout #1: Formal List	**Layout #2: Informal List**	**Layout #3: Grid**
Prioritizes organization over exposition. Most common homepage layout.	Prioritizes context over parsimony. Second most common layout.	Prioritizes placing everything about the fold. Rarely encountered.

Homepage Census Results

An informal census (focusing on primary menus and disregarding footers) of roughly three dozen COE mobile homepages revealed trends in content and audiences prioritized. Homepages overwhelmingly focus on prospective students, contain a menu that is roughly eight to nine items long, and skew toward program-related content and goal accomplishment.
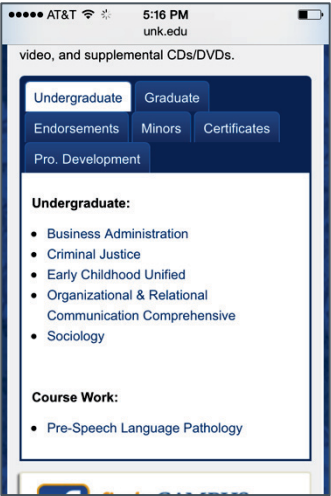
Homepage Item	Count	General Location	
Programs	31	Top	
by Program Type	25	Top	
in General	19	Top	
by Academic Level	15	Top	
by Student Level	9	Top	
by Modality	6	Top	Need-to-Have
by Student Motivation	2	Top	
Search	28	Top	
About/Why Us	24	Top or Bottom	
Call to Action	22	Top or Bottom	
In General	14	Top or Bottom	
Call	12	Top or Bottom	
Request for information	12	Top or Bottom	
Apply/Enroll	9	Top or Bottom	
Email	8	Top or Bottom	
Social media	3	Top or Bottom	
News	18	Bottom	
Events	14	Bottom	
Testimonials	13	Middle or Bottom	Nice-to-Have
Maps	12	Middle or Bottom	
Calendar	12	Middle	
FAQs	11	Middle	
Tuition	6	Middle	
Student Resources	6	Middle or Bottom	
Alumni Resources	5	Middle or Bottom	
Community	4	Middle or Bottom	Best in Footer/Below Fold
Faculty Resources	4	Middle or Bottom	
Virtual Tour	4	Middle	
Locations	4	Middle	

Optimizing Program Menu Design

The primary good continuing, online, and professional education units sell is education programs—and often a wide variety. As a result, the design and organization of program portfolio menus should be a key consideration in your mobile optimization plan. This section presents the standard program menu design layouts as well as organizational schema used by mobile-optimized COE websites.

Three Program Menu Layouts, One Far Dominant
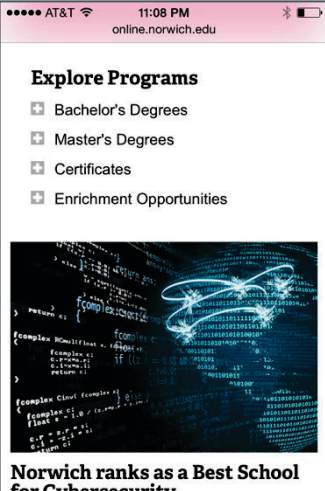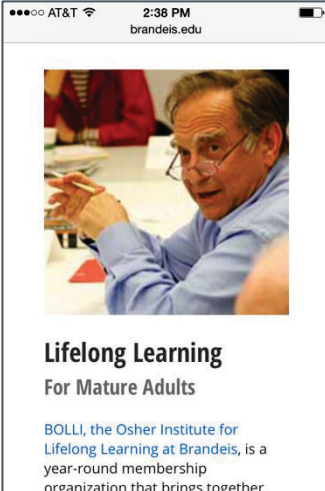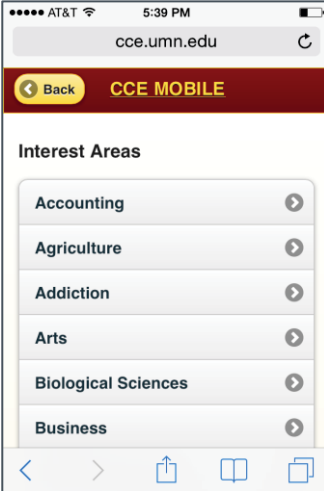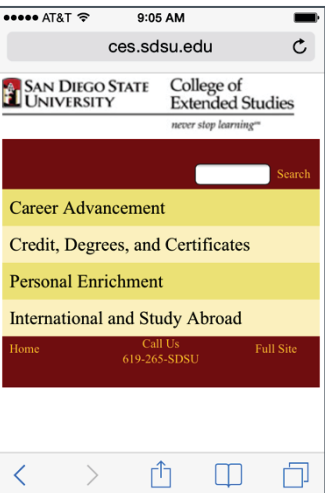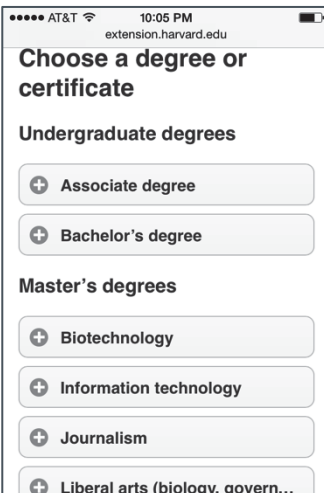
By far the preferred program portfolio menu layout is the list. The formal list presents each category succinctly and plainly—no explanatory text included. The informal list generally includes a graphical element along with a brief introduction or teaser to the category. This list format sacrifices space efficiency for greater detail earlier on in the shopping process. The formal list is the more popular layout. A third, far less frequently encountered menu layout is the tab layout. While it provides several options in a condensed yet easy-to-browse manner, it can be aesthetically awkward. A fourth option, found only once, is a dropdown menu that culls the list of program options presented according to visitor-selected criteria. In addition to being potentially difficult to physically select from, such dropdown menus are ineffective for visitors who simply want to understand an institution's full scope of programs.

Formal List	Informal List	Tabs
Prioritizes organization over exposition. Most common homepage layout.	Prioritizes context over parsimony. Second most common layout.	Prioritizes placing everything about the fold. Rarely encountered.

Content Arrays: A Multitude of Ways to Slice Up Program Portfolios

Programs can be presented in any number of ways and examples of the most common can be found below. Which method is best depends on the composition of your portfolio, your target market, and your audience segmentation strategies. As these various inputs are not always in agreement, it is not uncommon to find multiple program menus branching off a homepage, each organized along different lines (e.g., one menu organizing offerings by level, one by academic discipline, etc.). More is not always better, however. After the third separate program organization menu, navigation becomes difficult—the visitor may feel pulled in different directions.

Program Level	Student Age	Student Interest Area

Student Motivation	Level + Modality	Level + Interest Area

Case Studies in Mobile Migration

How Other Universities and COE Units Made the Transition

- The Road to Responsive "Retrofit"
- Determining Content Strategy and Measuring Its Effectiveness
- The One-Man Mobile Build
- Conducting Formative Research
- Using Mobile to Sell Big-Ticket Items

Case Studies in Mobile Migration

How Other Universities and COE Units Made the Transition

Sometimes the best way to learn something is through observation; a surprising number of member requests are to know how institutions or units like them completed a certain task. With that in mind, we pulled together the following cases to demonstrate how select COE units and universities undertook various aspects of the transition to mobile.

Cases were selected on the basis of what the experience had to teach and the applicability of those lessons, not necessarily because they were particularly exceptional.

Read on to learn:

1. How the University of Vermont **Traversed the Road to Responsiveness**

2. How the University of the Incarnate Word's Extended Academic Programs **Determined Content Strategy and Measured Its Effectiveness**

3. How Pittsburg State **Executed the One-Man Mobile Build**

4. How Norwich University's College of Continuing and Graduate Studies **Conducted Formative Research to Compete with "Brand Name" Schools**

5. How Brandeis University's Graduate Professional Studies **Used Mobile to Sell Big-Ticket Items**

#1: The Road to the Responsive "Retrofit"

Mobile Optimization at the University of Vermont

Setting the Stage

The web team at the University of Vermont (UVM) is small. Four individuals serve as consultants to the University's many colleges and units, each of which maintain their web presence under a decentralized model. In the early days of mobile, the web team kept a watchful eye on what was going on elsewhere, but made no efforts to bring it to UVM. A series of motivated student interns, some compelling trends in web analytics, and a few rounds of trial and error eventually changed that. The mile markers on that path and lessons learned along the way are outlined below.

2010	*2011*	*2012*
iUVM App	**Parallel Site**	**Responsive Site**
• Student built app in collaboration with Admissions	• Student built site with more guidance from web team	• Significant upfront time investment (quality checking content)
• Test balloon for mobile	• Used MIT's open source framework	• Provided content owners with best practices guidelines and templates
• Proved impossible to maintain for all the emerging devices	• Drew on MIT, UCSD, and Harvard parallel sites for inspiration	• Began with key campus units (e.g., academics) and working towards more peripheral units/units with a firmer handle on web presence (e.g., athletics)
• Not an attractive option for prospects with enough apps in their life—and no clear sense of why a school-specific app would be valuable	• Ultimately a mobile stopgap: struggled with standard HTML content	
	• Arduous maintenance due to diverse content generators/owners	

Three Facts That Tipped the Balance in Favor of Responsive

1 Content Owners Resistant to Maintaining Parallel Site

As mentioned, UVM operates under a decentralized model. Each unit is responsible for crafting and updating web content. When the parallel site went active, the early adopters on campus (i.e., units that added their content to the parallel site first), quickly realized they now essentially had to add and update content on two sites. Other units resisted transitioning in the first place. All parties were looking for a better option.

2 Observed User Behaviors Indicated Demand for More Mobile Content

The web team noticed a telling trend in behavior among visitors to the parallel site: visitors were attempting to land on specific sections/pages that didn't exist on the parallel site by adding the web address terminations they pulled from the desktop site. The parallel site contained only limited content—and that wasn't adequate to prospective students.

3 Unpeeling Layers in Web Traffic Highlighted Mobile for Prospects

The web team at UVM had observed a growing proportion of that traffic was coming from mobile devices, but peeling back the layers proved revealing. When restricted to only external web traffic (i.e., traffic coming from outside of the institution), the percentage coming from mobile doubled (to approximately 10%). They further isolated only the traffic coming to the admissions page showed and the percentage coming from mobile doubled once again. The message was incontrovertible: mobile was growing fast in general, but it was going particularly fast among prospective students. This was enough to convince most units of the importance of mobile optimization.

Web Traffic from Mobile, 2012

Bar chart showing: All 5%, External 10%, Admissions Page 20%.
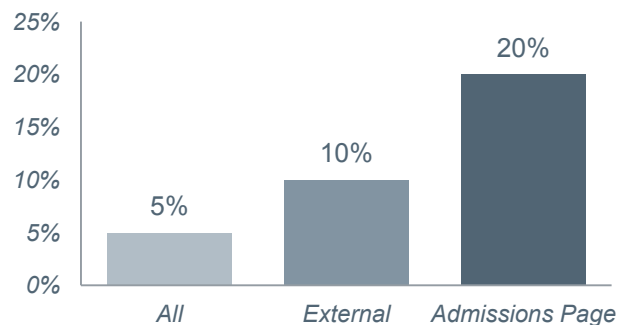
Key Takeaways

- Consider using cost-effective student interns who are looking to grow their web design portfolio.
- Play out future workload impacts for each of the different mobile optimization methods (web app, responsive, parallel, etc.) in order to foster buy-in for your method of choice.
- Use prospect-oriented analytics to peel back the layers and understand how prospective students are using mobile.
- Provide content owners and generators with best practice guidelines, templates, and examples to facilitate the creation and maintenance of high-quality copy.

#2: Determining Content Strategy and Measuring Its Effectiveness

Planning for Mobile Longevity at the University of Incarnate Word's EAP

Setting the Stage

In 2013, Julie Weber and her team at the University of the Incarnate Word's Extended Academic Programs (EAP) determined that the site that had been in place was not performing well on mobile. A look at the site's Google Analytics revealed a growing audience and increasing requests for information that were coming from tablets and mobile devices, but a troublingly large portion of the mobile traffic was leaving almost immediately after arrival. A responsive website was the obvious choice for Julie and her team.

Process Overview

Hire Vendor

- National vendors were cost prohibitive
- Selected Texas Creative, vendor that had helped build desktop site
- Vendor's responsibilities: completing the web design work, collaborating on the site's architecture, and managing the CMS
- EAP's responsibilities: content generation, rebuilding the site

Conduct Front-End Research

Ensure that the new site meets visitor's needs using:

- Surveys of current students and alumni
- Conversations with prospect-facing staff

Scrub Content

- Remove repetitive and/or outdated content
- Pay particular attention to menus and calls to action that encourage prospects to reach out to recruitment staff

Measure Effectiveness

Monitor the health and growth of the mobile site on a weekly basis using:

- Google Webmasters
- Google Adwords
- Google Analytics
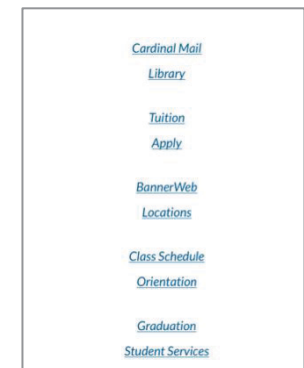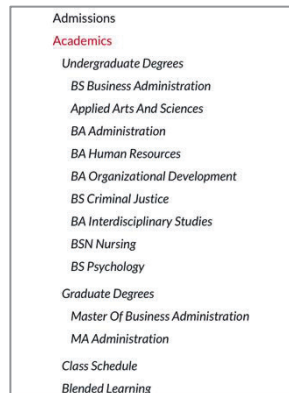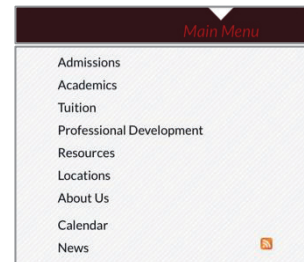
Menus clockwise: UIW Sites, Adult Education Main Menu, Academic Sub-Menu, Quick Links

Measuring Effectiveness

Now approaching a year since the responsive site went live, Julie reports encouraging traffic patterns. Leads to the site in general (not mobile specific) have increased by 15%, which Julie attributes primarily to prospective students' ability to quickly input contact information on the RFI. Of those who reach out, approximately a quarter (22%-31%) matriculate. Julie has also noticed that leads that come in from the web make a decision much faster than the typical three to six months, which she thinks is because they have typically spent more time doing their research.

15%
Increase in leads attributed to streamlined RFI forms

22%-31%
Percentage of leads that matriculate
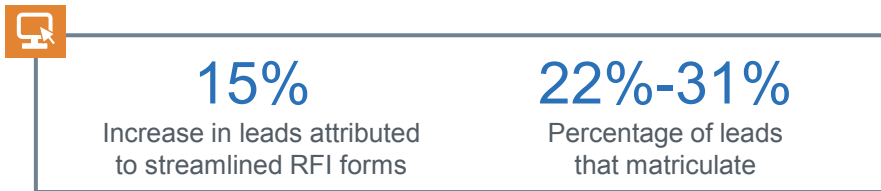
Mobile Metrics

Traditional KPIs like time on page and bounce rate may not be relevant for mobile traffic. Mobile shoppers tend to be more transaction oriented than their desktop counterparts, so it might make sense that they don't stay for long. Accordingly, Julie focused her mobile KPI strategy on ways in which visitors engage in action. What she really wants to know is whether visitors are calling, emailing, using the campus/satellite location maps, signing up for an event, or otherwise taking a concerted step toward learning more about UIW.

Coming Soon

In keeping with her call to action strategy, Julie is currently thinking through ways of encouraging visitors to ask for more information. Opportunities to download or email content serves the dual purpose of engendering good will (through content give-aways) and helping visitors continue their shopping on other devices and at other times. Such content includes program-specific career, certification, licensure, and continuing education information. Shown here is an example of program-specific (Elementary School Teacher Certification) career information and resources.

IMAGE CREDIT: Bureau of Labor Statistics

Key Takeaways

- Consider local web design vendors, who will likely be less expensive than their large, national counterparts

- Assemble a toolkit of monitoring resources (e.g., Google Analytics, Adwords, Webmaster) and check each on a weekly/biweekly/monthly basis.

- Consider ways in which traditional KPIs (e.g., bounce rate, time on site) may not be appropriate for mobile; identify metrics that follow from mobile behavioral patterns

- Offer free career and program-specific content to engender good will, keep prospects engaged, and allow prospects to continue their shopping process on another device.

Case Study: The One-Man Mobile Build

Transitioning to Mobile at Pittsburg State University

Setting the Stage

Michael Fienen was the Director of Web Marketing at Pittsburg State University when he decided that the institution needed a mobile-optimized site. As he figured, mobile was not going away—it was not a fad. He notes that, "In the brief history of the web, we've seen only a couple major paradigm shifts in the Internet. The first was the shift from a small, infantile web where a few companies had staked territory, to one where anyone and everyone could have a site. Suddenly the web flattened out. The second shift was to the read-write web, a place where not only can you have your site, but you can contribute to others. The web socialized, it began to get a personality, and it was your personality. Now, we are moving to mobile devices – the next shift. I don't look at this as a technological shift (by itself) because the change occurring isn't just about the hardware, it's about how we design, construct, and consume information."

Without asking for further permission, Michael got to work—a one-man army building the site primarily in his off-time over the course of a couple weeks. He did this because he understood that in terms of priorities, building the mobile site didn't really fit in to his 9-5 workload, but he was also confident that mobile could not wait for his project schedule to lighten up. Michael explains, "Our deployment isn't perfect, we aren't as feature rich as some, but what we have done is create a great foundation to move forward on." Here's how he did it.

Strategy Starts with Informed Planning

Michael's first step was to start building a strategy based on research into user habits. To this end he used informal, anecdotal conversations with colleagues and website analytics. Google Analytics has built-in visitor segmenting by mobile devices and carrier, and Michael wanted to understand those trends. While he knew that the gold standard was a well-built site that could be used on any device, he also knew that true responsive web design might have to be a long-term goal. His initial goal was to get something up and running and that would satisfy (at least partially) mobile user needs and convince the administration of the value of mobile. He noticed that 83% of his users were on devices with WebKit-based browsers. He also noticed that users were coming to the site with specific goals in mind (accessing the university portal and email were top of the list). He used this as a starting point from which to grow. He explains his thinking, "Rather than taking a long time to get everyone, I'll take a little time to get most people, and deal with the long tail."

Michael's Path to Mobile

1. Research.
How are mobile visitors currently using your site:
- Analytics
- Surveys
- Focus groups
- Conversations with staff

2. Identify Easy Wins.
What can you easily and rapidly develop and deploy?

3. Pick a Framework.
Don't reinvent the wheel. Base your website on a pre-existing framework or model.
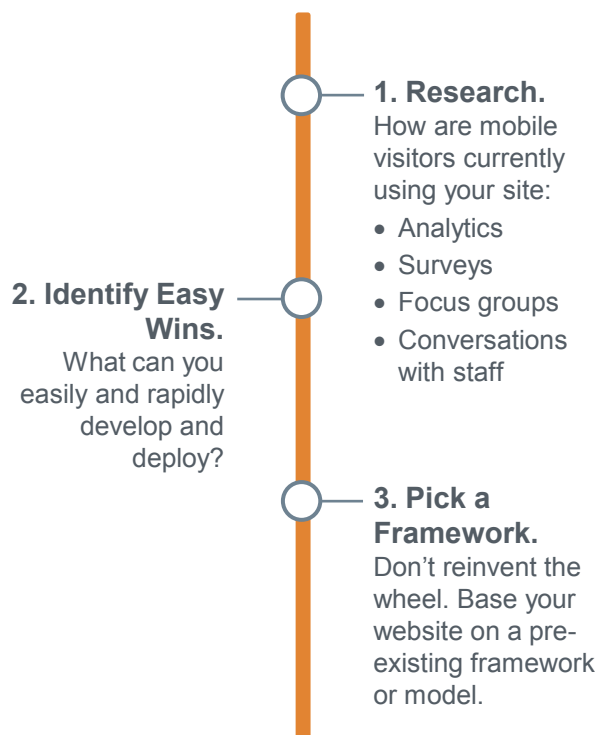
Continually Fine-Tune Strategy

The mobile site's initial feature set was based on two things: what analytics told Michael about where on the site people were going while using mobile devices and what he could easily integrate without polluting the interface (news and calendar). From within the mobile site and from the site's PC-based "About" page, there are links to recommend features or report bugs. Michael planned to use these comments as well as periodic user-focused research to continually understand what his users needed.

Michael's Path to Mobile, Cont.

4. Rethink Content. Determine how, where, and whether to use content from your desktop site on your mobile site.

5. Set Baseline Goals. Keep these minimal, simple, and realistic

6. Build. Don't forget to include analytics

7. Watch. Listen. Measure.

8. Improve. Set New goals.

Repeat…Indefinitely
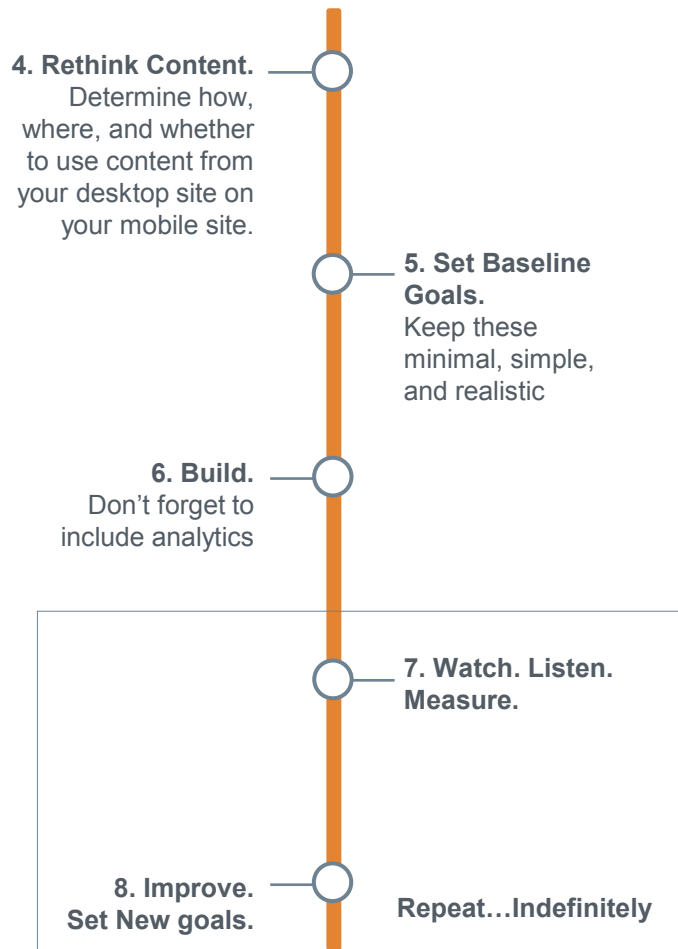
Key Takeaways

- Research audience needs and habits. Having a mobile site isn't just about making your current site look pretty on mobile phones. Usability is different. Accessibility is different. Trends are different.

- Don't be afraid to compromise. Many teams don't have the time or resources to build their dream mobile site in one go. Plan phases into your feature roll out and admit to all parties that good work can take time.

- Don't reinvent the wheel. It's hard to be revolutionary, and if you are, you risk alienating audiences with predefined expectations. Your mobile site might end up looking like someone else's, and that's okay. Make your tools good, usable, and valuable. People will forgive you even if you aren't setting a new standard.

- Measure and adjust. Even the most successful web designs will turn stale over time. The web is like a living organism; you must take care of it.

Case Study: Conducting Formative Research

Preparing for Mobile Helps Norwich University Compete with "Brand Name" Schools

Setting the Stage

In early-to-mid 2011, Norwich University's College of Graduate and Continuing Studies (CGCS) set into motion plans to overhaul its website. At the time, CGCS' online curriculum offerings were spread across two websites and the team wanted to unify that web presence into one redesigned unit website. After a thorough RFP process, CGCS selected OHO Interactive as their partner in this endeavor.

Input Gathering from Three Key Stakeholder Groups

CGCS in conjunction with OHO Interactive maintained the positive attitudes toward the redesign, which would now include mobile optimization, by conducting thorough formative research with key stakeholder groups including current students, alumni, prospective students, community members, and faculty, staff, and administrators. Each audience contributed unique insight to the project.

Students and Alumni

1. Demonstrated Usage Patterns and Behaviors

- Current students: explained how the website was and was not being used

- Alumni: suggested how the website could be used to stay in touch and keep alumni engaged

University Staff and Faculty

2. Provided Buy-In and Coordination

- CGCS staff: helped vendor (OHO Interactive) get to know the voice and character of the institution it was representing; provided insight into prospect behaviors and demands

- Main campus administrators: identified opportunities to redirect visitors from main Norwich site to CGCS when appropriate; ensured consistent touch and feel between main and CGCS sites

Prospective Students

3. Delivered Insight into Use of Web in Shopping and Decision-Making Processes as Well as Norwich Brand Perception

- Helped identify most sought-after content and useful resources

  - Underscored importance of ROI statements

  - Unearthed demand for statements of faculty credentials

- Helped discover branding strengths and weaknesses

  - Revealed that prospects harbored misconception that Norwich students had to serve in the military after graduation

The End Result: High-Impact and To-the-Point Homepage

CGCS Mobile Homepage

Impossible-to-Miss Features:

A. Primary calls to action (call, request info, and apply)

B. Non-prospect visitors (e.g., alumni, current student) redirection

C. Search

All are easily found and well above the fold as seen in the snapshot shown here.

Compelling Testimonials and Quality Indicators:

D. Carousel of unit features and accolades each accompanied by a link to learn more

E. External acknowledgements of quality

Easy Program Browsing:

F. Short menu clearly presents offerings

Helpful Footer:

G. Footer (truncated here) contains a wealth of links—some redundant—so that visitors don't have to scroll back up the page to find what they need

✓ Low bounce rate: 33% and 50% for desktop and mobile respectively

✓ Strong length of visit: 4:15, 4:21, and 2:00 for desktop, tablet, and mobile respectively

✅ **Key Takeaways**

- Extensive and diverse formative research forms the foundation of a sound mobile or desktop site

- Formative research should be integrated with brand and market research to identify misperceptions that should be corrected

- Usability testers can be valuable for identifying which pieces of the site's architecture are working—and not—before before going live with the site

Source: Norwich University, online.norwich.edu.

Case Study: Using Mobile to Sell Big-Ticket Items

Mobile Strategy at Brandeis University's GPS

Setting the Stage

Like many other units considering a transition to responsive web design, Brandeis' Graduate Professional Studies (GPS) decided to redesign its website in the process. Making the website responsive was a natural opportunity to scrutinize the content strategy currently in place and ensure that everything was up-to-date.

Mobile as an Intermediate on the Path to Conversion

GPS Executive Director Anne Marando and her team developed a new content strategy that was better suited to the decision-making process prospective students typically went through. GPS offers only online master's degree programs that appeal primarily to professional adults. Prospects were unlikely to make such a significant commitment of both time and money via a mobile device. Experience had shown that they were unlikely to do so even on a desktop unless they had had some sort of one-on-one contact with GPS. As Anne relays, "We get ten times the value when we are able to speak with a prospect over the phone." Accordingly, Anne and her team decided that mobile site would be a lever driving visitors to reach out to GPS.

Program-Specific Calls to Action Are Core of Site Architecture
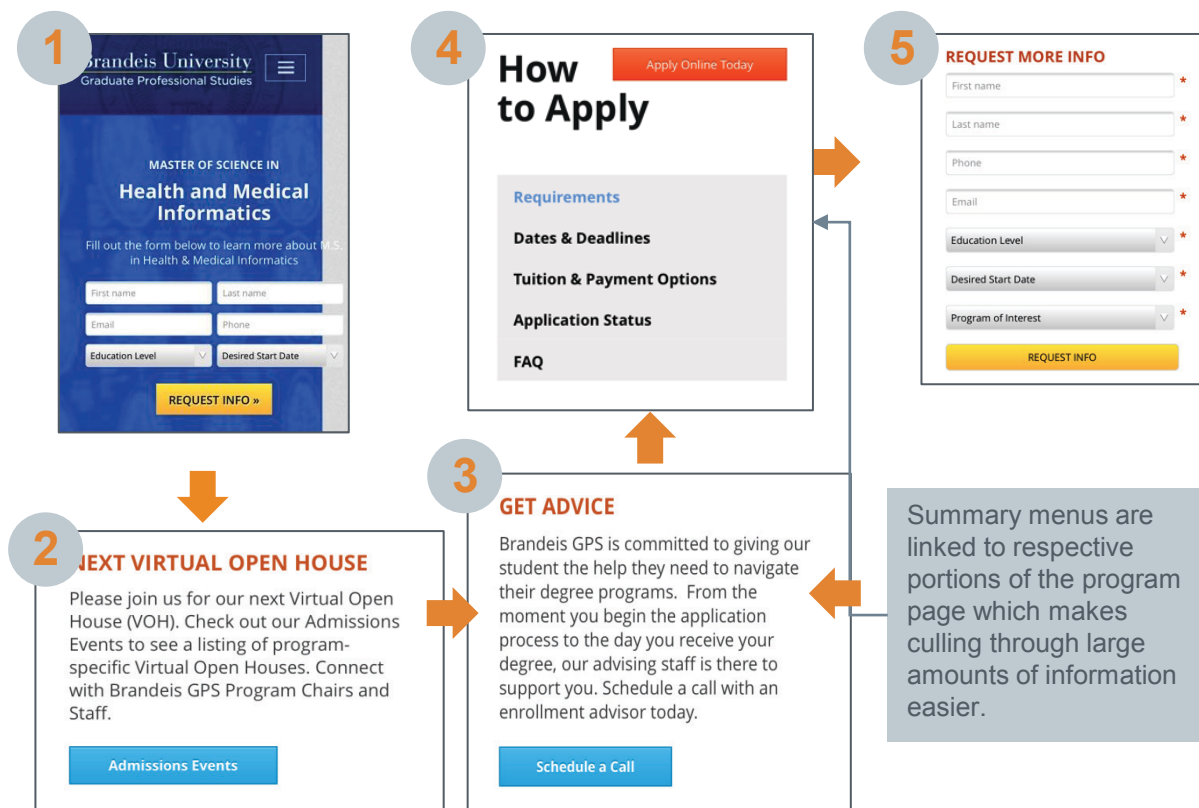
Outcomes Support Hypotheses

Since launching the newly redesigned and responsive site in August of 2013, GPS has seen an impressive jump in web traffic—though not coming from mobile. This was expected: they never thought that their target market was itching to shop for master's degree programs with mobile devices. While GPS has seen a 10% increase in mobile traffic since deploying the new site, this pales in comparison to the nearly 300% increase they have seen in desktop traffic.

Mobile Still Secondary to Desktop
Increase in Web Traffic Post-Redesign
(Representative)
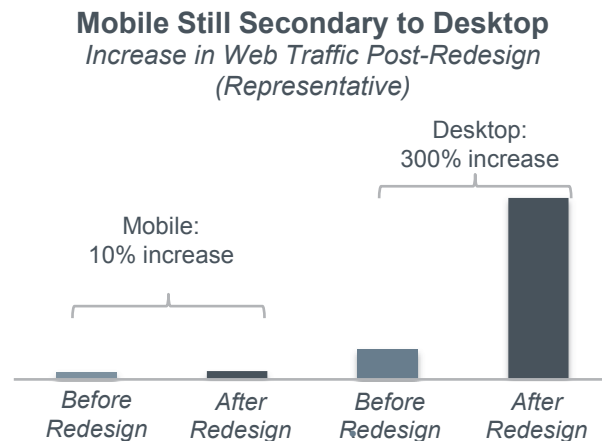
While prospects might not be flooding in through mobile, the GPS team is comfortable knowing that the site is mobile optimized and the responsive site is ready for any shopping trends that might come down the pipeline.

Key Takeaways

- Mobile can be used to sell large-ticket items, like degrees, by using a diversity of calls to action and providing additional information all of which drive prospects to reach out to the recruitment team

- Calls to action should be tailored to each program and numerous enough that visitors never wonder what they should do next

- Calls to action should vary in magnitude (e.g., small tasks like attending a webinar, larger tasks like calling or applying, and others in between) so that prospects at all stages of commitment to the shopping process find something appealing

- RFI forms placed at the top and the bottom of each program page save prospects that have browsed the entire page from having to scroll back to the top

- Large quantities of information should be presented with summary boxes and/or hyperlinked menus to facilitate browsing