

Web Updates Handbook

At many organizations, updating the unit’s website can be seen as a “not-it task”—seemingly never ending. However, an up-to-date website is critical for a strong marketing and recruiting presence. An out-of-date website undercuts your reputation, deters prospects, and makes it less likely they will visit again (which is especially detrimental across long decision cycles).

The key to making updates manageable is prioritization—where do you get the most return on your time—and using that knowledge to assemble a comprehensive update list. Prospects come to your website with certain expectations or tasks in mind; the pieces of your website that deserve a higher share of your attention are the ones that correspond with those tasks in mind.

There are three parts to this tool. The first, derived from our interviews with web optimization and design consultants, consists of a series of questions and process that best-in-class marketing organizations use to identify prospects’ top tasks. In the second part of the tool, based on interviews with organizations serving adult and online students as well as an audit of dozens of COE websites, we have synthesized a customizable list of the pieces of your website that need updating. Finally, to aid in the process of delegating different update tasks to the appropriate content owner, the tool will provide a responsibility assignment table and advice for developing an ongoing update calendar.

Identifying Top Features Based on Visitors “Tasks in Mind”

A top feature is any piece of your website that a large number of visitors came to your website to find and is essential for people to be able to find quickly and easily. Visitors typically come to your website with a specific task in mind. If it isn’t easy to complete that task, they will leave.

1. Listen to Customer Questions

- What questions do your visitors ask when they send you an email or call your office?
 - Where can I find information about ...?
 - Do I qualify for...?
 - How do I...?
- Ask program coordinators what types of prospect questions they encounter most frequently.

2. Review Your Data

- Review your web analytics to figure out what people are looking for on your website.
 - What are your most-visited pages?
 - On which pages do people spend the most time?
 - What top search phrases do people use when coming from search engines?
 - What are the top search phrases within your search engine?

3. Talk to Prospects

Get out of the office and talk to people. Different audience groups often have different top tasks, so if your website serves several audience groups, talk to each group to determine what is most important to them.

- Talk to visitors about their critical tasks. For more information on using focus groups, see Tool #5.
 - Why do they use your website?
 - What’s easy to use?
 - What’s difficult?
 - Are there things they’d like to, but can’t now, do online?
- If you’re running a survey on your website, ask visitors what task they were trying to accomplish, and whether or not they were successful. For example:
 - What is your primary task in coming to the site today?
 - How easy or difficult was it to complete that task on a scale of 1 – 5? See Tool #3 for usability testing information.

1) Adapted from www.howto.gov/web-content/manage/focus-on-top-tasks

Web Updates Handbook

We compiled the following starter list of top features based on interviews with COE marketing experts and the Stamats Group's survey of adult students most sought-after web content¹. In order to account for any slight differences due to program type or your microsegments, modify this list in light of the analysis outlined on page one of this tool.

Enter Your Top Features Here

Starter List

1. Cost to attend	4. Time to completion	7. Graduate placement and outcomes
2. Program offerings	5. Transfer credit policy	8. Student / Alumni Testimonials
3. Financial aid	6. Classroom format	9. Faculty profiles

Your Additions

1. _____	4. _____	7. _____
2. _____	5. _____	8. _____
3. _____	6. _____	9. _____

Customizing A Comprehensive Update List

With top features in hand, you are now ready to build the rest of your update list (top features should go at the top of the list). The list below is meant to be a starting point. Add or subtract items based on your specific website features and needs. This can also be a good activity for a web team meeting. Bring copies of this list to the table and allow all of your content owners, design experts, and technical staff to weigh in on it.

	Item	Owner
Top Features: Are the following present and up-to-date?		
	Cost to attend	
	Program offerings	
	Financial aid	
	Time to completion	
	Transfer credit policy	
	Classroom format	
	Graduate placement and outcomes	
	Student / Alumni Testimonials	
	Faculty profiles	
	Custom:	
	Custom:	
	Custom:	
	Custom:	

1) Stamats, 2012 Adult Students TALK

Web Updates Handbook

	Item	Owner
Communication Features: Are the following active and up-to-date?		
	Inquiry forms	
	Email addresses	
	Instant chat lines	
	Phone numbers	
	Addresses	
	Directories	
	Custom:	
	Custom:	
	Custom:	
	Custom:	
Interactive Features: Are the following active and up-to-date?		
	Transfer credit calculator	
	Tuition calculator	
	External links	
	Internal links	
	Online Demos	
	Custom:	
	Custom:	
	Custom:	
Dates: Are the following present and up-to-date?		
	Start dates	
	Application deadlines	
	In-person event dates	
	Virtual event dates (e.g., webinars)	
	Holidays	
	Breaks	
	Custom:	
	Custom:	
	Custom:	
	Custom:	

Web Updates Handbook

	Item	Owner Initials (may be multiple)
<i>“About Us” Content Features: Are the following, if present, up-to-date?</i>		
	Mission	
	History/Tradition	
	News	
	Accreditation	
	Institution features (centers, other colleges, etc.)	
	Custom:	
	Custom:	
	Custom:	
	Custom:	
<i>Program Content Features: Are the following, if present, up-to-date?</i>		
	Industry features	
	Instructor names, bios	
	Curriculum overview	
	Outcomes snapshot	
	Faculty / employer testimonials	
	Custom:	
	Custom:	
	Custom:	
<i>Student Service Content Features: Are the following, if present, up-to-date?</i>		
	Career counseling	
	Academic planning	
	Experiential learning	
	Other student services	
	Custom	
	Custom:	
	Custom:	
<i>Miscellaneous: Are the following, if present, up-to-date?</i>		
	Micro-segment content features (e.g., military)	
	Custom:	
	Custom:	
	Custom:	

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Web Updates Handbook

Sample Content Owners and Administrators Table

Use a version of this table to assign tasks to the appropriate team members. Begin building the table by mapping the left-most column to your website's site map structure.

Content owners are responsible for the content of the web sub-sections assigned to them in the table; they can and should use the master update list on the pages prior to assemble their own personal update lists. Maintaining their sections of the website will require cross-coordination in many cases. Content owners should consider delegating content updates to other staff within their unit, although the overall content of these sections remains the content owner's responsibility.

Website Major Section (derived from site map)	Content Owners (program / marketing staff)	Content Administrators (usually I.S. staff)
Home Page	Holly Hart	Evan Eve
About Us		
Leadership	Daisy Daring	Evan Eve
Directory	Daisy Daring	Evan Eve
Mission, History	Holly Hart	Evan Eve
News and Events	Matt Mares	Evan Eve
Academics		
Academic Programs		
Degree Programs		
Bachelor's Degree Completion Programs		
B.S. in Criminal Justice	Kevin Kite	Greg Gore
B.S. in Strategic Studies and Defense Analysis	Joyce Jewel	Greg Gore
Master's Degree Programs		
M.A. in Diplomacy	Colin Cloud	Greg Gore
M.A. in History	Alice Apple	Greg Gore
M.A. in Military History	Alice Apple	Ian Igloo
M.S. in Leadership	Nancy Nile	Ian Igloo
M.S. in Nursing	Nancy Nile	Ian Igloo
Certificates		
Certificate in Governmental Operations	Blair Bones	Greg Gore
Certificate in Teaching and Learning	Polly Pear	Greg Gore
Academic Support (Advising, Catalog, etc.)	Paul Plains	Evan Eve
Student Experience		
What to Expect	Sarah Swan	Evan Eve
A Week in the Life	Felicity Fellows	Evan Eve
How to Be A Successful Online Learner	Ryan Rain	Evan Eve

Web Updates Handbook

Sample Meeting Agenda for Assembling and Finalizing Website Update Delegation

Use the following agenda across one or a series of meetings to initiate a comprehensive prioritized, yet manageable and sustainable, website update protocol.

- I. Walk through *Website Content Owners and Administrators Table* (ideally will be completely filled out beforehand; if not, it can be assembled with the help of the web team during this meeting)
 - Goal: to make sure everyone is aware of their website-related responsibilities
- II. Walk through the Comprehensive Update List
 - Goal: to use the expertise and experience in the room and to customize the list to your website needs. Add and subtract elements where necessary
 - Goal: to assign ownership for each of the items on the final list (may be multiple owners for some items)
- III. Discuss how to build Content Owner-Specific Update Lists
 - Goal: to provide a quick explanation of how the Comprehensive List can be the starting point for developing a personal update list (i.e., each content owner should go through the Comprehensive List and pull out all items that fall into their area(s) of responsibility as outlined by the Website Content Owners and Administrators Table)
- IV. Determine a Schedule for Ongoing Updates
 - Goal: to arrive at a consensus regarding when different parts of the website should undergo updates mindful of the content that experiences rapid turnover (e.g. news, events, deadlines) and content that is most sought-after (i.e., top features)