

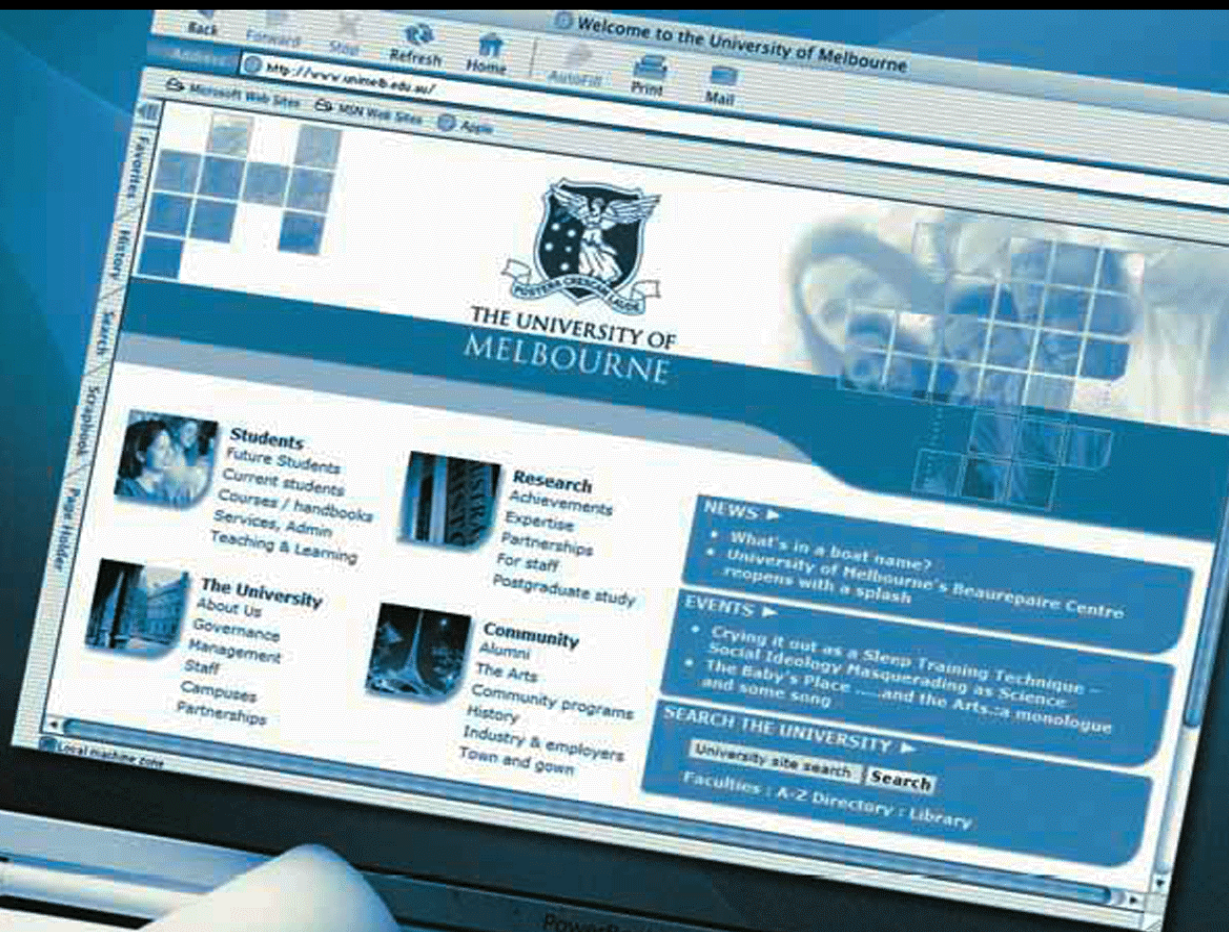


THE UNIVERSITY OF
MELBOURNE

2004

Navigation and content on university home pages

The University of Melbourne >



University Web Centre



THE UNIVERSITY OF
MELBOURNE

Navigation and content on university homepages

Research study by
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Summary of findings

The home page is the most visible online representation of a university's style, activities and reputation. We studied the home pages of 68 universities in Australia, Canada, the United States of America, south-east Asia and Europe, looking for emerging industry standards and opportunities for improving our home page's quality and usability.

Key audiences

Judged by the types of content on their home pages, most universities have the same key audience groups:

- Prospective (or future) students
- Current students
- Current staff
- Prospective employees
- Alumni
- Businesses that employ university graduates or could benefit from a consultancy or staff training relationship with the university
- People living in the town or suburbs adjacent to a university campus
- Journalists in the mainstream news media

Few universities target web content directly at staff of government departments or agencies.

Information architecture of a university home page

Current industry standard

Multiple navigation paths into the broader web site:

- Group static links into audience and topic categories; label the groups "For" and "About"
- Where appropriate, provide two or more links from the home page to a key content page; these links should have different titles
- Visually emphasise links to key content
- Allow users to choose between using a search engine or browsing a site map or index/directory

News and events headlines, updated at least weekly, and a link to a "News and Events" subsite.

In the "For" list, provide links to information for at least five audiences:

- Current students
- Prospective (or future) students
- Current staff
- Prospective employees
- Alumni

In the "About" list, provide links to at least four subsites:

- Research activities and services
- Course descriptions
- Description of the university
- Teaching and learning (pedagogical style and quality)
- News and events (if not linked from another section of the home page)

Elsewhere on the page, provide links to:

- Library
- Search
- Contact details, staff directory
- Site index, sitemap

Designate a space in the layout for advertising special events or services, preferably with a small clickable graphic. Update the promotional item regularly.

Help prospective students and other 'comparison shoppers' find their way around more easily by using common link titles for core content. See [Link titles](#) for more examples.

Beyond the norm: adding value to a home page

Clearly indicate when the page was last updated with new content.

Avoid jargon and vague link titles. Use clear, specific link titles that indicate what users should expect to see when they click.

Keep the focus on external audiences. Move intranet content to subsidiary pages: don't use the home page as a bookmarks file for students and staff.

Don't assume people already know who you are, where you are and what you do. Put a positioning statement on the home page: goals, values, motto, marketing tagline.

Every pixel is precious: use images to support your key promotional messages, not merely as decoration. Publish a relevant photo with the headline of a current media release or news story.

Recommendations for the University of Melbourne

Should we adopt the industry standard, using link titles and information architecture models that are already known and understood by web users? Alternatively, we could elect to try a different IA model (a newspaper metaphor, for example, or a myYahoo-style portal) and attempt to distinguish ourselves from other universities. There is a risk in individualism that we would compromise the usability of our site.

Add the Group of Eight logo to the home page, and link it to the Group of Eight web site. This will bring us into line with the majority of other Group of Eight members' sites.

Ask stakeholders for details about the key marketing messages and themes the University wishes to convey. Based on these messages and themes, review the design and content of the home page. Decide whether to emphasise factual content or emotional impact. Use images to convey specific marketing messages instead of serving mainly decorative purposes.

Consider including a graphic advertisement on the home page, promoting university-wide events such as Discovery Day and Orientation or spotlighting special campus events such as a research expo or a Red Cross blood drive. The graphic should be small, eye-catching, accompanied by explanatory text and linked to a relevant web page. It should change at least weekly.

Consider placing on the home page a short version of the positioning statement from "The Melbourne Agenda". Particularly for an international audience, this would help distinguish us from other Australian universities.

Clearly identify and understand the audiences for research-related information and promotions. Review presentation of research information on the web so that it is more targeted and less generalised.

Review link titles on the home page. Where appropriate for our audiences and content, use common words and phrases from the lists in this report.

In planning any changes to link titles or organisation of content on the home page, test all proposed solutions with real web users who represent the University's key audiences. Use the lists and examples provided in this report to conduct card-sorting and other user-testing activities.

Conduct user-testing to determine whether arranging home-page content into "For" and "About" sections would improve the site's usability for current students and staff (these two groups are the most numerous users of the web site).

Goal of this study

Identify current practice for the link titles and organisation of content on university home pages.

Method

1. Identify 68 home pages to be reviewed and analysed:
 - All Australian institutions, as defined by the federal Department of Education, Science and Training
 - Universitas 21 members
 - Ivy League colleges
2. Create a checklist of characteristics (see [Attachment C: Checklist](#)). The checklist is based on the one used for the 2002 "Best Foot Forward" benchmarking project.
3. Complete a checklist for each home page.
4. Note any additional features of interest to Web Centre. Identify examples of good and poor practice.
5. Collate results and analyse.
6. Write a report summarising findings.
7. Distribute draft report for peer review.
8. Revise report (if required) and release.

The study was conducted in July and August 2004 by Claire Spencer and Margaret L Ruwoldt.

Results and analysis

Freshness of content

Usability studies over several years have indicated that web users consider the 'freshness' of content when judging whether a site is credible and trustworthy.

Each week most universities would have opportunity to publicise at least one or two of the following:

- Social, sporting or arts activities on campus
- A lecture, conference or seminar that's open to the public
- Academic or student visitors
- Media releases about research or teaching at the university
- Academic experts quoted in external media
- News of interest to current staff or students

This kind of promotional information is ideal as 'fresh' content for a university's home page. It can often be automatically served from databases, reducing the need for a webmaster to manually update the home page.

We looked for dates, keywords ("Today's events on campus") and media-release headlines as indicators of content freshness on the 68 home pages.

Almost two-thirds of universities had updated their web pages during the week we collected screenshots for this study.

NEW CONTENT ADDED	NUMBER OF UNIVERSITIES
Today	11
This week	33
This month	13
Unknown	11

Organisation of content

Almost all universities provide multiple navigation pathways into their web sites. They usually achieve this two or more of the following ways:

- Visually emphasising links to key content
- Providing two or more links from the home page to a key content page; the links typically have different titles and are displayed under different subheadings or in different sections of the home page
- Allowing users to choose between using a search engine or browsing a site map or index/directory
- Highlighting topical or timely links in advertisement-style graphics
- Using the "For" and "About" groupings of links, or using other subheadings for groups of semantically-related links

Most universities offer a search box on their home page, and 40 allow advanced or targeted searching from the home page.

Forty-nine universities group links under the subheadings "For" or "Information for". The links under these headings are named for different web audiences: prospective students, media, visitors et cetera.

Fifty-five universities group links under the subheadings "About" or "Information about". The links under these headings are named for different topics: the university, research, courses and so on.

More than half the universities use both "For" and "About" groupings. Most of these universities label the groups of links with subheadings.

Some homepages have no subheadings, instead showing semantic relationships visually by setting groups of links apart from each other. This could degrade a page's usability and accessibility: users of screen-reader devices and text-only browsers could find the content confusing or disorganised.

Branding and advertising

Content emphasis

The style or emphasis of a home page's content can be used to convey marketing themes about the institution. For example, photos of people of various races engaged in social activities, with text links to clubs and sports team pages, would indicate the university considers its cosmopolitan campus lifestyle an important selling point in recruiting new students.

Of the 68 home pages we looked at, 39 emphasise factual, statistical information on their homepages. Twenty-seven emphasise lifestyle and the atmosphere of their campuses, and the remaining two were evenly balanced.

A home page's style should be based on the university's communication and marketing plans, and any final decisions about how to convey a marketing theme or message should rest on testing designs and content with actual web users.

Use of images

Forty-eight of the surveyed home pages use images primarily as visual decoration; only 24 pages use images to convey specific information or relate directly to text content on the home page. (This excludes graphic advertisements, which are addressed below.)

Using images as decoration increases the size of a web page and its download time, without necessarily enhancing the page's usability or accessibility.

Using images to convey specific information, or as illustration for text content, can add meaning and clarity to a web page, and can effectively convey key marketing themes or messages.

Featured items or promotions (advertisements)

Excluding news and events listings (which are addressed in the [Content types](#) section of this report) almost half the surveyed home pages have some sort of featured item or advertisement:

- 21 pages have graphic advertisements for university events, facilities or services
- 10 pages have text advertisements or promotional items

The graphic advertisements are typically used for externally-focused or student-specific promotions. The graphics are usually small, though two universities have large 'feature' photos of graduates with links to profiles of those alumni.

Advertisements relevant mainly to staff of the university tend to be text-only.

The University of Michigan visually separates externally-focused news and advertising/marketing elements from the more internally-focused items listed under "Michigan Focus".



Position statement on home page

Most universities seem to assume web users have some prior knowledge about the institution's history, strategic directions or marketing themes.

Fifteen home pages display a brief positioning statement about the university's mission.

Only one home page specifically mentions the university's history; another has a 'featured item' link to a subsite about the institution's centenary.

Profile of research activities

Changes to government funding of research, public perceptions of universities and increasing pressure to commercialise the products of research mean that most universities are keen to promote their R&D activities. This is reflected in university home pages.

Many home pages have links aimed at particular audiences, including postgraduate research students. These links are discussed in "For" links.

In general, though, research promotion is generalised and not clearly aimed at a specific audience or market segment. Forty-seven of the 68 home pages have a "Research" link. Some go further, with a group of research-related links gathered together under a "Research" subheading.

Other universities combine the word "research" with another keyword or phrase, producing link titles like:

Research & centers	Research @ [name of university]
Research & commercialisation	Research activities
Research & consultancy	Research areas
Research & development	Research degrees
Research & industry partners	Research Fellow Investment
Research & innovation	

News headlines on home pages often include one or two research-related stories, which helps raise the public profile of research activities at the institution.

Other research-related link titles include:

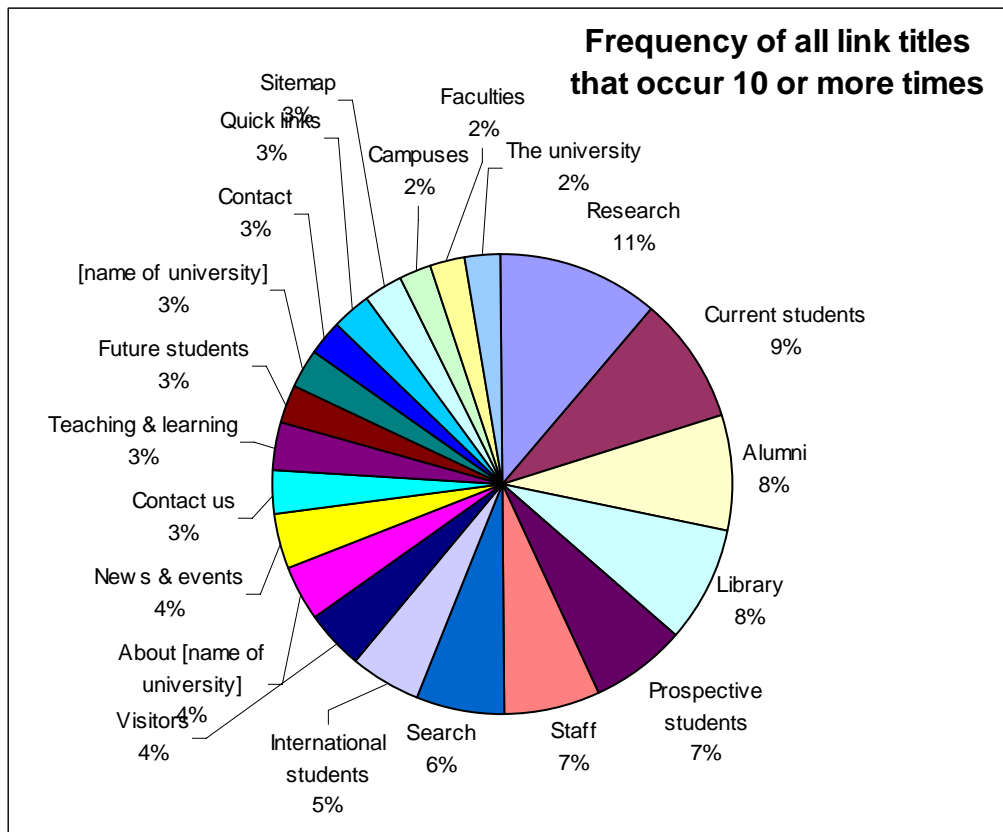
Business	Commercial project
Business & community	Commercial services
Business & community links	Corporate connections
Business & government	Doing business with [name of university]
Business & industry	Industrial liaison
Business & services	Industry & employers
Business opportunities	Industry collaboration
Business/community	Industry liaison
Consulting services	Industry/employers

Link titles

Most-used link titles

The 68 surveyed home pages use a total of 1380 links to provide navigation into their underlying web sites.

The chart below shows the link titles used 10 or more times across all 68 home pages.



Almost half (44.42 per cent) of all links on the 68 home pages have unique titles: that is, the link titles are not repeated on a single page or on another university's page. This suggests a large degree of localisation in web content: universities tailor their navigation links to suit their own particular jargon and local audiences.

To get a better understanding of these unique link titles, and whether there were in fact any commonalities between them, we analysed the types of information and services they represent. See [Content types](#) for this analysis.

Link titles: frequency of use on 68 home pages

NUMBER OF UNIQUE LINK TITLES	OCCURRENCES PER LINK (FREQUENCY BAND)	TOTAL LINKS IN THIS FREQUENCY BAND	% OF TOTAL
21	10-47	411	30%
21	5-9	140	10%
86	2-4	216	16%
613	1	613	44%
741		1380	100%

Thirty per cent of all link titles are used 10 or more times across the 68 home pages. Sometimes the link title is duplicated on a single page; mostly the replication is across different pages.

Many prospective students and staff visit more than one university web site when choosing where to apply. Using some or all of these common link titles on a university

home page, and elsewhere on the top levels of the site, should help these users find their way around more easily. Of course, the final choice of link titles should always be based on usability testing with real users who represent the geographic and cultural location of the individual university.

Link titles used 10 or more times on 68 home pages

LINK TITLE	OCCURRENCES
Research	47
Current students	36
Alumni	33
Library	33
Prospective students	28
Staff	27
Search	26
International students	20
Visitors	17
About [name of university]	16
News & events	16
Contact us	13
Teaching & learning	13
Future students	12
[name of university]	11
Contact	11
Quick links	11
Sitemap	11
Campuses	10
Faculties	10
The university	10

Link titles used 5-9 times each:

Administration	Directories
Libraries	Events
Media	Faculty & staff
Help	Group of 8 (logo)
Jobs at [name of university]	International
Students	Staff directory
Contacts	A-Z index
Courses	Current staff
Giving to [name of university]	Maps
my [name of university or computer system]	News
	Webmail

Link titles used 2-4 times each:

About the university	Jobs
About this site	Learning & teaching
Academic programs	Login
Academics	Medical center
Academics & research	New students
Admission	News and events
Admissions	Orientation
Admissions & financial aid	Partnerships
All about the university	People & contacts
Alumni & friends	People/web search
Athletics	Postgraduate students
A-Z directory	Postgraduate study
Business & community	President's welcome
Business & industry	Programs & courses
Campus life	Prospective
Campus maps	Prospective staff
Campuses & maps	Publications
Community	Quick links (drop-down menu)
Consulting services	Quickfind
Contact [name of university]	Research & consultancy
Corporate connections	Research & development
Departments	Research & industry partners
Development application	Research @ [name of university]
Education	Schools

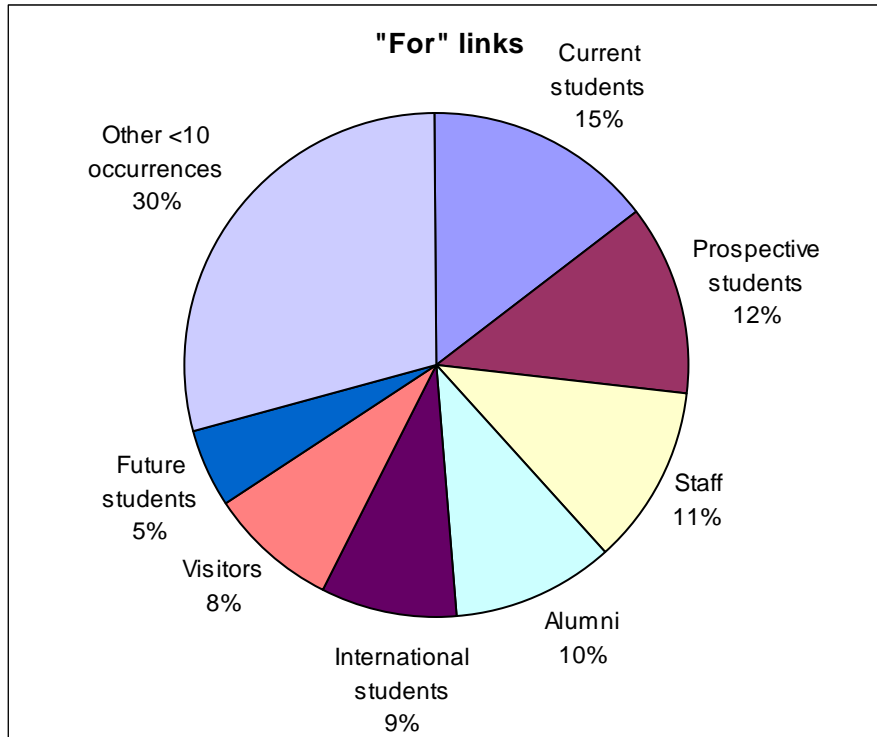
E-learning	Search [name of university]
Employment	Services
Employment opportunities	Services & facilities
Explore [name of university]	Site index
Faculties & departments	Sitemaps
Faculties & divisions	Student information
Faculties & schools	Student life
FAQ	Student services
Featured links	Study at [name of university]
Feedback	Studying at [name of university]
For alumni	Teaching
For prospective students	The uni
For staff	Timetable wizard
Graduate students	Universitas 21 (logo)
Graduates/productions	Virtual tours
Health/medical center	Web CT
Home	Webmaster
Index	Welcome
Intranet	Working at [name of university]

Another 613 link titles are used once only, on a single web page, and not repeated anywhere in the sample.

"For" links

Among the 49 universities that have a set of audience-oriented links labelled "For," there are clearly some common audiences.

The pie chart below indicates the most commonly-used link titles in this section of university home pages. This chart applies only to the 49 universities that have a "For" section on their home pages.



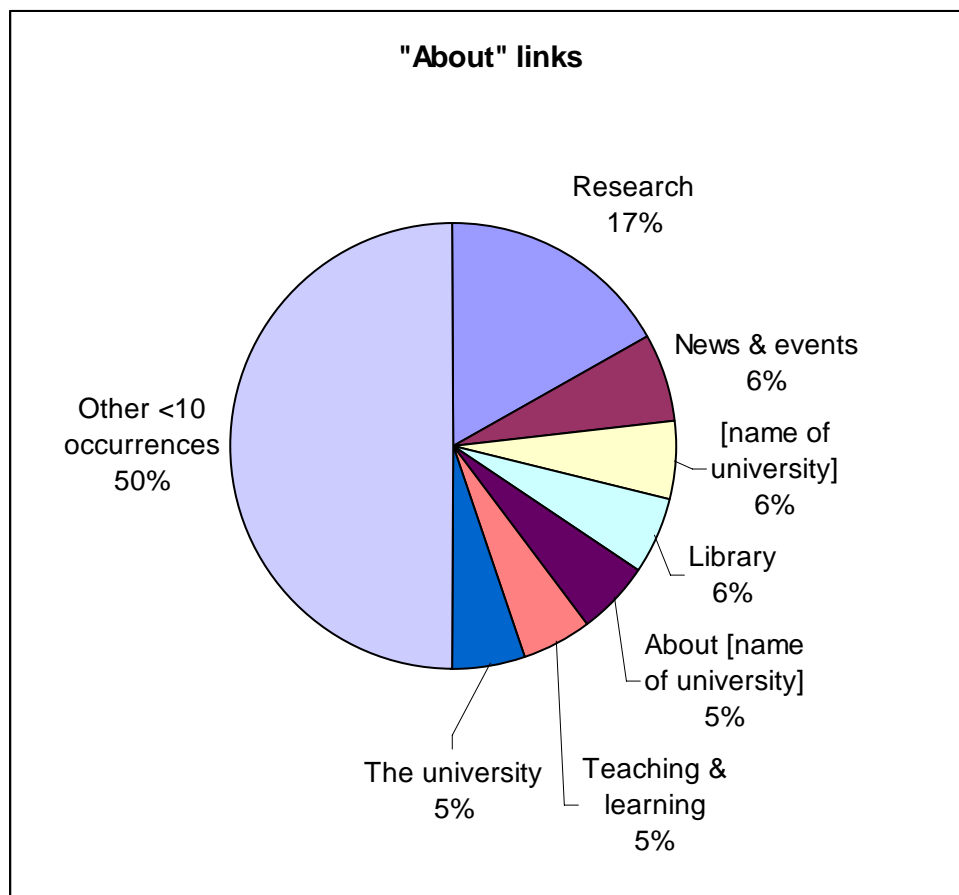
LINK TITLES IN A "FOR" SECTION	OCCURRENCES
Current students	30
Prospective students	25
Staff	23
Alumni	21
International students	18
Visitors	17
Future students	10
Other	60
Total	204

Link titles with fewer than 10 occurrences in a "For" section are:

Academics	Graduates/productions
Alumni & friends	Media
Business & community	New students
Business & industry	Postgraduate students
Community	Prospective
Current staff	Prospective staff
Faculty & staff	Research
For alumni	Research & industry partners
For prospective students	Students
For staff	

About" links

The pie chart below identifies the most commonly-used link titles in the "About" section of 55 university home pages.



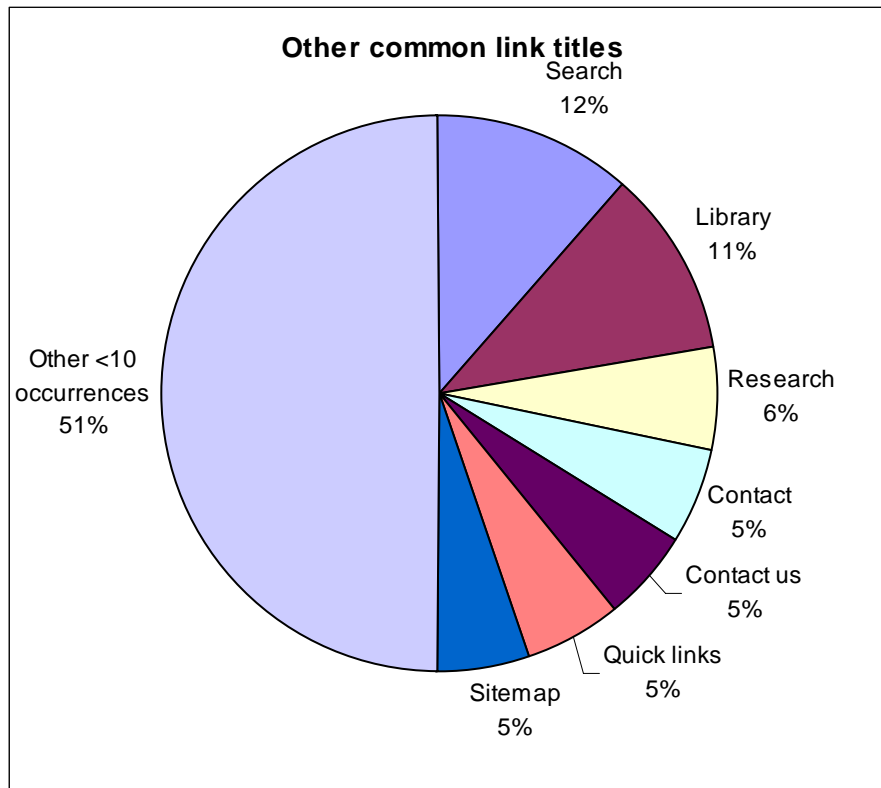
LINK TITLES IN AN "ABOUT" SECTION	OCCURRENCES
Research	33
News & events	12
[name of university]	11
Library	11
About [name of university]	10
Teaching & learning	10
The university	10
Other <10 occurrences	97
Total	222

Link titles with fewer than 10 occurrences in an "About" section are:

About the university	Jobs
Academic programs	Jobs at [name of university]
Academics & research	Learning & teaching
Administration	Libraries
Admission	Medical center
Admissions	News
Admissions & financial aid	People/web search
Alumni	Programs & courses
Athletics	Research & consultancy
Campus life	Research & development
Campuses	Research @ [name of university]
Campuses & maps	Schools
Contact us	Search
Courses	Services
Employment	Services & facilities
Faculties	Student life
Faculties & departments	Student services
Faculties & divisions	Studying at [name of university]
Giving to [name of university]	Teaching
Health/medical center	The uni
International	

Other common link titles

All the surveyed home pages have some links that do not appear in either a "For" or an "About" section. The most common 'other' link titles are indicated below.



Other link titles that appear fewer than 10 times each, and not in a "For" or "About" section, are:

- | | |
|------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| About [name of university] | Intranet |
| About this site | Jobs |
| Administration | Jobs at [name of university] |
| All about the university | Libraries |
| Alumni | Login |
| A-Z directory | Maps |
| A-Z index | Media |
| Campus maps | my [name of uni or computer system] |
| Campuses | News |
| Community | News & events |
| Consulting services | News and events |
| Contact [name of university] | Orientation |
| Contacts | Partnerships |
| Corporate connections | People & contacts |
| Current students | Postgraduate study |
| Departments | President's welcome |

Development application	Prospective students
Directories	Publications
Education	Quick links (drop-down menu)
E-learning	Quickfind
Employment opportunities	Search [name of university]
Events	Site index
Explore [name of university]	Sitemaps
Faculties	Staff
Faculties & schools	Staff directory
Faculty & staff	Student information
FAQ	Students
Featured links	Study at [name of university]
Feedback	Teaching & learning
Future students	Timetable wizard
Giving to [name of university]	Universitas 21 (logo)
Graduate students	Virtual tours
Group of 8 (logo)	Web CT
Help	Webmail
Home	Webmaster
Index	Welcome
International	Working at [name of university]
International students	

Content types

Many universities have their own jargon, and the use of language varies from city to city and country to country. This means a simple count of identical link titles may hide some common features of university web sites, because (for example) each university gives its own name to its online learning system or staff intranet.

To better understand the common types of content and services linked from university home pages, we categorised each of the 1380 link titles and looked for themes and similarities within those categories.

News and events

Nineteen home pages have a link titled "News and Events" or "News & Events". This equates to 4 per cent of all links examined in this study.

Examples of 'events' links:

Ask Me day	International Week
Conferences, seminars	NUS centennial
Conferences/events	Open Day
Corporate events	Open day 8 September
Dates of semesters	Principal dates
Events	Semester dates
Events calendar	Things to do/UVA news
Important dates	Today @ Columbia

Examples of 'news' links:

2005 higher education reforms – latest information	News
2005 higher education reforms for students and staff	News & events
Announcement	News and events
Bulletins	News centre
Columbia news	News review
ECU Update magazine	News, events & notices
Latest news	News/events
Latest university briefing	Newsletter
More ECU news	Noticeboard
	UQ news

As well as a link to a secondary web site, news stories and events information are provided on home pages in various ways. Examples are summarised in the table below.

TYPE OF CONTENT ON HOME PAGE	NUMBER OF SITES
Link to news, events or "news and events" site	49
News headline/s	47
Events headline/s	20
"For" link for media or journalists	14
News photo	12
Link to university magazine or newspaper	5
Directory of experts	3
Events photo	2

Other content types

To get a better understanding of the types of information linked from university home pages, we categorised the 1380 link titles into groups of related topics.

The categories are summarised below. Attachment D lists examples of links in each category.

DIRECTORY CATEGORY

Description: Directories, site maps, lists and search engines that help users find their way around a web site or make contact with the university.

Number of links: 249

Comment: Directories, site maps and search engines are normally used as adjuncts to the main navigation of a web site. The number of links in this category indicates that universities are having difficulty making their sites easily navigable, and feel a need to supplement their "for" and "about" navigation with other pathways into the site.

INTRANET CATEGORY

Description: Portals, learning management systems and other content clearly intended for current staff or students.

Number of links: 113

Comment: At most Australian universities, the majority of web and network traffic is likely to come from current students and staff.

This is a large, internal audience with information needs that are very different from the needs of external users of a university's home page.

The size of these internal audiences, and their regular use of enterprise systems (HR, finance, online learning, email) warrants separating 'their' web content and services from the public web site.

Instead of providing individual links from the home page to enterprise systems, a single intranet site could be linked from the home page. The intranet site could serve both students and staff, as many of their information needs are similar. If more sophisticated technology is available, people could login to receive more targeted information (with a content management system) or a personalised home page (with portal technology).

ABOUT CATEGORY

Description: Corporate information describing or introducing the university.

Number of links: 103

Comment: Clearly an important element in a web site intended as the public face of a university.

COURSES CATEGORY

Description: Lists of courses and academic disciplines, introductory pages about studying at the institution, handbooks, graduate outcomes and levels of study.

Number of links: 84

Comment: Different from the Directory category, because course information for a university is an analogue of the catalogue for a bookshop or department store.

Course descriptions are of interest to three main audiences: prospective students, current students, and course coordinators. Another small, but significant, group of users is the staff who produce printed course brochures, handbooks and marketing material.

CAMPUSES CATEGORY

Description: Travelling to the campus, wayfinding on campus, student accommodation, services and facilities available on campus, descriptions of campuses, webcams and virtual tours.

Number of links: 81

Comment: Generally done badly, with a lack of clarity about users' information needs and few standard ways of presenting maps, addresses, promotional images, transport details and other wayfinding information.

STUDENTS PROSPECTIVE CATEGORY

Description: Information about applying to study at the university.

Number of links: 73

Comment: Prospective students increasingly use the web to investigate their study options before applying to a particular university. Recognising this audience's importance, most university home pages have at least one clearly-labelled link to marketing/student recruitment information.

Other information and services of interest to this audience group could include Research, Campuses, Courses and Services. Any subsidiary pages under the "Prospective students" link should be cross-linked to these other site areas.

There is an emerging trend towards calling this audience "Future students", perhaps recognising that—in these days of TAFE programs, full-fee higher education places and fee-for-service single subjects—it is possible to study at a university without following traditional entry paths and selection processes. Where universities once selected students solely on the basis of academic results, increasingly it's becoming possible for a student to select a university on the basis of personal preference and an ability to pay tuition fees.

RESEARCH CATEGORY

Description: Research activities, commercialisation of research, consultancy services, fields of research expertise, research degrees and initiatives intended to increase the profile of the university's research.

Number of links: 73

Comment: Because we used Universitas 21 and Ivy League universities as the international component of this study, the sample is somewhat biased towards 'research-intensive' universities.

In Australia, changes to government funding and increased privatisation of research have stimulated universities to present more research-related information on their web sites. Many universities offer research-based consultancy services as income-generating activities. As well, some universities are concerned about promoting science and technology as career paths for young people.

Consequently a significant number of Australian universities have at least a "Research" link on their home page. There appears to be no clear 'good practice' standard for the type and focus of research information provided; this may emerge over time.

COMMUNITY CATEGORY

Description: Sport, social and arts activities, community development, services for businesses, donating to the university, information aimed at the university's local community.

Number of links: 69

Comment: While universities sometimes make gestures of goodwill towards their geographically local communities, in general the institution exists to serve its internal community: its students and staff.

Nevertheless, some university facilities and activities are available to the general public. This is particularly so in the USA where student sports teams draw large crowds to their matches and some institutions (Yale, for example) have invested heavily in developing business and social infrastructure in their local area.

In Australia, some universities invite donations and bequests from the public; this follows a well-established American model of seeking philanthropic support from alumni and businesspeople.

ALUMNI CATEGORY

Description: Information for graduates of the university.

Number of links: 59

Comment: Half the links in this category are to "Alumni", with no indication about what kind of information or services the web user should expect to find.

The other universities seem to regard their alumni as potential sources of financial donations or political support, as employers of students and other alumni, or as the parents of current or future students.

NEWS CATEGORY

Description: News releases, newsletters and magazines, lists of experts available for media comment, and other information for journalists and editors.

Number of links: 59

Comment: Many universities combine their Events and News content into a single subsite, publicised with headlines and other links from the home page. Together the News and Events categories are represented on all but two or three of the 68 home pages.

A few universities have heeded the advice of the Nielsen Norman Group¹ and provide home-page links to help journalists find experts and information quickly. McGill University goes a step further, using a newspaper metaphor for the structure and content of its home page.

LINKS CATEGORY

Description: Consortiums, spin-off companies, research and business units with their own recognised name, and information about the university's links with external businesses.

Number of links: 57

Comment: Linking to external sites can enhance an organisation's credibility on the web: it demonstrates confidence, business alliances and (sometimes) a sound reputation in the off-line world.

Some navigation links in this category should probably be in the Directory category. They are categorised as Links because are presented in ways that do not make clear their purpose or relationship to the university: they convey the impression that the company or centre is an independent organisation, rather than a wholly-owned subsidiary of the university. This sort of ambiguity could raise doubts in the web user's mind about the validity of other, genuinely outward-looking relationships.

LIBRARY CATEGORY

Description: University libraries.

Number of links: 53

Comment: The library is obviously an important online resource for students and staff: three-quarters of the surveyed home pages have a link to the university library. Even universities with fully-fledged student and staff portals (Monash and Deakin, for example) have a "Library" link on their home pages.

¹ Kara Pernice Coyne and Jakob Nielsen (2001) "Designing Websites to Maximize Press Relations". Nielsen Norman Group, Fremont, California, USA.

EMPLOYMENT CATEGORY

Description: Job vacancies, promotional material aimed at prospective employees, and career development information for current staff.

Number of links: 51

Comment: Over the next 5-10 years, Australian universities are expected to face a shortage of qualified academic and specialist general staff. Recruitment of excellent early-career staff is therefore becoming a strategic priority, and it's important that a public web site should provide sufficient, appropriate information to attract top-quality job applicants.

As well, universities need to provide career development, regular communication and other services for their current staff. This could be achieved with a well-designed university-wide intranet site, particularly if portal or content management technology is available to manage and customise the interface for individuals and departments.

STUDENTS CURRENT CATEGORY

Description: Intranet pages for enrolled students. Exam and subject timetables.

Number of links: 42

Comment: This is a large, internal audience with information needs that are very different from the needs of external users of a university's home page.

The size of a university's student body, and students' regular use of enterprise systems (online learning, email) warrants separating 'their' web content and services from the public web site.

This could be achieved with a well-designed intranet site, particularly if portal or content management technology is available to manage and customise the interface.

SERVICES CATEGORY

Description: Support services for students and staff, shops, medical and dental clinics on campus, and e-commerce facilities.

Number of links: 36

Comment: Links in this category can have a dual purpose: they provide easy access to services for current students and staff; and they help to market the university as a desirable place to live, study and work.

MANAGEMENT CATEGORY

Description: Strategic plans, organisational structure and governance, budget and policy information.

Number of links: 30

Comment: A central principle of customer service, customer relationship and user-centred design practices is that the organisational structure and bureaucracy should not interfere with a customer's experience of an organisation. The presence of

Management content on a public home page usually indicates the organisation is more interested in its bureaucracy than in its people.

QUALITY CATEGORY

Description: The university's approach to teaching students.

Number of links: 24

Comment: A "teaching and learning" link is a common feature of Australian university home pages. For a web user unfamiliar with the phrase, this may be a vague and confusing link title. T&L content for staff could usefully be moved into an intranet site. Information for public consumption (marketing or peer review, for example) should be clearly labelled, avoiding jargon.

Though the Australian Universities Quality Agency has audited and reported on several universities over the last two years, few home pages have prominent links to quality-assurance documentation or AUQA reports.

STUDENTS INTERNATIONAL CATEGORY

Description: Information specifically for international students.

Number of links: 24

Comment: Some recent studies of student perceptions have found that international students prefer to be treated as part of the mainstream student population, rather than being identified as a separate special-interest minority group. However, there remain a range of services and information needs (visas, for example) that are unique to international students.

See also the International category, below.

EVENTS CATEGORY

Description: Specific campus-based events and to calendars of dates and events. Links to combined news-and-events subsites are counted in the News category above.

Number of links: 22

Comment: As well as being of interest to students, staff and the local community, a list of current and forthcoming events can bolster a university's reputation. Public lectures and forums, arts and cultural activities all contribute to perceptions of the university as exciting, vibrant and intellectually stimulating.

See also the News category, above.

WEB INFORMATION CATEGORY

Description: Help and FAQ pages, metadata about the university's web site, and mechanisms for commenting about the web site.

Number of links: 20

Comment: Like the Directory category, above, this category is primarily concerned with helping web users find their way around the site.

STUDENTS CATEGORY

Description: Student-related links that do not differentiate between prospective and current students, or levels of study.

Number of links: 16

Comment: Visual grouping in a page layout may help to clarify the purpose and likely audience for these links. However, more explanatory link titles would be more helpful and accessible.

INTERNATIONAL CATEGORY

Description: Non-specific "International" links, plus links to information about the university's overseas connections or efforts to internationalise its curriculum. See also the International Students category, above.

Number of links: 15

Comment: While being seen as "international" is presumably a positive, it's clear that universities have widely different interpretations of what "international" actually means. Any such links on a home page should clearly state what sort of "international" information they lead to.

STUDENTS NEW CATEGORY

Description: Information specifically for students commencing their first year of study.

Number of links: 10

Comment: North American universities, in particular, have a tradition of providing programs to help new students adjust to the university environment. This is an emerging trend at Australian universities, particularly as concern increases about student attrition rates and the related government funding issues.

OTHER CATEGORY

Description: University-specific jargon or miscellaneous content that appears only once, on a single university site.

Number of links: 17

Comment: Not analysed.

Design processes

Excepting the analysis of image content (see [Use of images](#)), in this review we did not examine design and layout of university home pages.

To do the content and structural analysis for this study, we stuck printed copies of all the home pages onto a blank wall opposite the meeting room and staff kitchen. We learned three things from this wall.

First, Web Centre staff and visitors walk past this wall regularly, and many people commented on the visual impact of the display—a useful reminder that a graphic display

can be a powerful tool for presenting data and explaining the nature of information architecture.



Second, the wall encouraged conversation and collaboration. Passers-by often paused to talk about something that caught their eye. Good for building relationships, and good for working out ideas that could contribute to any future design review by the Web Centre.

Third, on seeing all the pages together, we realised a large proportion of universities use blue as the dominant color on their home pages, and that a horizontal band of blue is a common design feature.

Attachment A: Background

In 2002 the Web Centre published "Best Foot Forward", a report identifying current good practice in university web sites. The study analysed the home pages of more than 40 universities in Australia, New Zealand, North America, Europe and Asia. It examined factors such as:

- Design
- Functionality
- Usability
- Content
- Navigation models

The results of the "Best Foot Forward" study were used during a 2002 redevelopment of the University of Melbourne's central web site.

In 2004 the Web Centre is again reviewing the University's central web site. Rather than undertaking a single, large-scale study of current practice in university web sites, we are looking at specific subsets of the "Best Foot Forward" topics.

In the first half of 2004, we reviewed the 'technical' aspects of university home pages: the ratio of visible text content to total page size, number of links, number of images, coding validation and grammars, and basic accessibility indicators. The result of that study was a 'homepage scorecard' comparing the University of Melbourne's performance with that of peer universities.

Another 2004 study identified current good practice in the presentation of corporate publications on university web sites.

Goals of this study

This is a desktop research and benchmarking project to identify current good practice for the content and navigation on a university's home page.

Specifically, we want to identify:

- Whether universities emphasise factual or qualitative information
- How often home-page content is updated
- How links are organised to provide pathways into the web site
- Whether images are used primarily as decoration, or whether they are directly related to text content
- The kinds of promotional content commonly appearing on university home pages

The outcome of this project is a written report.

Attachment B: List of universities

Australia

Adelaide University <http://www.adelaide.edu.au/>
Australian Catholic University <http://www.acu.edu.au/>
Australian Film Television and Radio School <http://www.aftrs.edu.au/>
Australian Maritime College <http://www.amc.edu.au/>
Australian National University <http://www.anu.edu.au/>
Avondale College <http://www.avondale.edu.au/>
Ballarat University <http://www.ballarat.edu.au/>
Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education <http://www.batchelor.edu.au/>
Bond University <http://www.bond.edu.au/>
Central Queensland University <http://www.cqu.edu.au/>
Charles Darwin University <http://www.cdu.edu.au/>
Charles Sturt University <http://www.csu.edu.au/>
Curtin University <http://www.curtin.edu.au/>
Deakin University <http://www.deakin.edu.au/>
Edith Cowan University <http://www.cowan.edu.au/>
Flinders University <http://www.flinders.edu.au/>
Griffith University <http://www.gu.edu.au/>
James Cook University <http://www.jcu.edu.au/>
La Trobe University <http://www.latrobe.edu.au/>
Macquarie University <http://www.mq.edu.au/>
Melbourne College of Divinity <http://www.mcd.unimelb.edu.au/>
Melbourne University Private <http://www.muprivate.edu.au/>
Monash University <http://www.monash.edu.au/>
Murdoch University <http://www.murdoch.edu.au/>
Newcastle University <http://www.newcastle.edu.au/>
Notre Dame Australia <http://web.nd.edu.au/>
Queensland University of Technology <http://www.qut.edu.au/>
RMIT University <http://www.rmit.edu.au/>
Southern Cross University <http://www.scu.edu.au/>
Swinburne University of Technology <http://www.swinburne.edu.au/>
University of Canberra <http://www.canberra.edu.au/>
University of Melbourne <http://www.unimelb.edu.au/>
University of New England <http://www.une.edu.au/>
University of Queensland <http://www.uq.edu.au/>
University of South Australia <http://www.unisa.edu.au/>
University of Southern Queensland <http://www.usq.edu.au/>

University of Sydney <http://www.usyd.edu.au/>
University of Tasmania <http://www.utas.edu.au/>
University of Technology, Sydney <http://www.uts.edu.au/>
University of the Sunshine Coast <http://www.usc.edu.au/>
University of Western Australia <http://www.unsw.edu.au/>
University of Western Australia <http://www.uwa.edu.au/>
University of Western Sydney <http://www.uws.edu.au/>
University of Wollongong <http://www.uow.edu.au/>
Victoria University of Technology <http://www.vu.edu.au/>

Ivy League universities

Brown University <http://www.brown.edu/>
Columbia University <http://www.columbia.edu/>
Cornell University <http://www.cornell.edu/>
Dartmouth College <http://www.dartmouth.edu/>
Harvard University <http://www.harvard.edu/>
Princeton University <http://www.princeton.edu/>
University of Pennsylvania <http://www.upenn.edu/>
Yale University <http://www.yale.edu/>

Universitas21 Canada and USA

McGill University <http://www.mcgill.ca/>
Simon Fraser University <http://www.sfu.ca/>
University of British Columbia <http://www.ubc.ca/>
University of Michigan <http://www.umich.edu/>
University of Virginia <http://www.virginia.edu/>

Universitas 21 Europe

Lunds University <http://www.lu.se/>
Birmingham University <http://www.bham.ac.uk/>
Edinburgh University <http://www.ed.ac.uk/>
Glasgow University <http://www.gla.ac.uk/>
Nottingham University <http://www.nott.ac.uk/>
University of Freiburg <http://www.uni-freiburg.de/>

Universitas21 Asia Pacific

Auckland University <http://www.auckland.ac.nz/>
Fudan University <http://202.120.224.5/>
Hong Kong University <http://www.hku.hk/>
Peking University <http://www.pku.edu.cn/>
National University of Singapore <http://www.nus.edu.sg/>

Attachment C: Checklist

University: _____

Content emphasis

- Factual, statistical
- Lifestyle, atmosphere

New content added

- Today
- This week
- This month

Organisation

- Audience links (For...)
- Topic links (About...)
- Research has high visibility
- Entry to site is flexible, several pathways
- Customised searching from home page

Use of images

- Decorative
- Related to text content

Positioning statement

- History of institution
- Mission, role

News

- Headlines
- Photo
- Full story
- Link to news site
- "For media" link
- Link to magazine or newspaper
- Directory of experts

Events

- Headlines
- Photo
- Full description
- Link to events site

Featured items or promotions (ads)

- Text
- Graphic
- None

"For..." links

"About.." links

Other visible links

Attachment D: Examples of links, listed by category

DIRECTORY CATEGORY

In the Directory category we placed links to directories, site maps, lists and search engines that help users find their way around a web site or make contact with the university.

Examples of links in this category:

A to Z	Information for (drop-down menu)
About this site	Lookup
Academic & administrative elements	Most visited sites
Academic units	Offices & services
Administrative centres	Org directory
Advanced search	Penn A-Z
All academic departments	People
A-Z directory	People & contacts
A-Z index	People/web search
A-Z listing	Quick finder
A-Z search	Quick links
Centres & schools	Quick links (drop-down menu)
Colleges and schools	Quickfind
Colleges, schools & centres	Resources
Connect here	Schools
Contact	Schools & admissions
Contact [name of university]	Schools & colleges
Contact information	Schools & departments
Contact us	Schools & divisions
Contacts	Schools & programs
Departments	Schools & sections
Desk references	Schools/departments
Direct links	Search
Directories	Search & directories
Directories & links	Search [name of university]
Directory	Search here
Directory of staff	Search/advanced search
Divisions	Service & admin divisions
Divisions & departments	Services & admin
Divisions & schools	Services & administration
Divisions, schools & centres	Services directory
Divisions, schools & units	Services, admin
Email	Site
Email addresses, fax and phone numbers	Site index

DIRECTORY CATEGORY

Emergency info	Site index (A-Z)
Enquire online	Site map
Fac & dept	Specialist centres
Faculties	Staff contacts
Faculties & academics	Staff directory
Faculties & admin units	Staff phone book
Faculties & administration	Student admin
Faculties & departments	Student enquiry form
Faculties & divisions	Student societies
Faculties & schools	TAFE divisions
Faculties, schools, divisions & organisations	Top ten visited sites
Faculty & staff	Uni fast find (drop-down menu)
Featured links	University contacts
Feedback and enquiries	Web guide
Index	Web sitemap
Index & search	Who's who

INTRANET CATEGORY

In the Intranet category we placed links to portals, learning management systems and other content clearly intended for current staff or students of the university.

Examples of links in this category:

Access UVA	my.monash portal
Brown intranet	OLT
Cecil learning management system	Online learning
Computer accounts	Policies
Corporate site	Policies & procedures
Current staff	QUT Virtual
Current staff & students	Resources for staff
Current students/Penn Portal	SOLS (Student Online Services)
Document library	Staff
Documents	Staff & student email
Documents & policies	Staff (intranet)
eCornell	Staff eMail
E-learning	Staff newsletter
E-mail & computing	Staff pages
eNABLE	Staff webmail
For faculty & staff	Student eMail
For staff	Student newsletter

INTRANET CATEGORY

goSFU	Student self service (nDeva)
Instructional toolkit	Students (intranet)
Internal website	Students/staff
Intranet	UNE online
ISIS	University policies
IT at UWA	University portal
IT policies	University webmail
Learning online (Web CT)	USQ Connect - staff & students
Login	Web & internet
Login to WebCT	Web CT
Minerva for faculty & staff	Web-based e-mail
Minerva for students	Webmail
MurdochNet policy	WebMail direct
my [name of university or computer system]	

ABOUT CATEGORY

In the About category we placed corporate information describing or introducing the university.

Examples of links in this category:

About the university	From the vice-chancellor
Welcome	History
Explore [name of university]	Information
President's welcome	Inside [name of university]
Publications	President's office
Annual reports	[name of university]
Discover [name of university]	Home
Facts	

CAMPUSES CATEGORY

In the Campuses category we placed information about travelling to the campus, wayfinding on campus, student accommodation, services and facilities available on campus, descriptions of campuses, webcams and virtual tours.

Examples of links in this category:

Accommodation	Off-campus housing
Accommodation & facilities	On campus
Campus map	Plantations
Campus maps	Road conditions
Campus pages	Roadworks around campus (PDF)
Campuses	Searchable campus map

CAMPUSES CATEGORY

Campuses & centres	Shepparton
Campuses & maps	Take the tour
Crichton campus	Travel & weather
Getting to UOW	UBC Robson Square
Hear the chimes	UC Brisbane campus
Housing	UVA maps
Live view	Virtual tours
Living at Yale	Visit Cornell
Locations	Visit us
Maps	Visiting Brown
Melbourne (Bundoora)	Visitor information
Melbourne (city)	Visitors
Mildura	Wayfinding at UBC
Mt Buller	Webcam

STUDENTS PROSPECTIVE CATEGORY

In the Students Prospective category we placed links to information about applying to study at the university.

Examples of links in this category:

Admission	For parents
Admission, enrolment & fees	For prospective students
Admissions	Future students
Admissions & aid	Graduate admission
Admissions & financial aid	Graduate applications
Applicants: Australian residents, international	IELTS examinations
Apply & enrol	Lifelong learning
Apply now	Prospective postgraduates
Applying to [name of university]	Prospective students
Career advisers & teachers	Prospective undergraduates
Early entry	Undergrad application
Enrol online	Undergraduate admissions
Enrolment guide	

COURSES CATEGORY

In the Courses category we placed links to lists of courses and academic disciplines, introductory pages about studying at the institution, handbooks, graduate outcomes and levels of study. We excluded names of specific degrees, as these usually appeared in the context of a special promotion or temporary announcement.

Examples of links in this category:

Academic courses	Online and off-campus learning
Academic programs	Other course guides
Academic programs & courses	Our courses
Continuing education	Postgrad & research
Continuing studies	Postgrad studies
Cooperative extension	Postgraduate study
Course areas	Programs & courses
Course finder	Prospectuses
Course information	Short course
Course tools	Students & handbook
Courses	Studies
Courses & careers	Study
Courses & degrees	Study @ [name of university]
Courses & programs	Study abroad students
Courses & study	Study at [name of university]
Courses @ [name of university]	Study choices @ [name of university]
Courses and degrees	Study in Australia
Courses/handbooks	Study options
Full time courses	Study programmes
Graduate qualities	Studyfinder
Handbook	Studying at [name of university]
LSA course guide	TAFE
New apprenticeships	Undergrad studies
New full time courses	Undergraduate study

RESEARCH CATEGORY

In the Research category we placed information about research activities, commercialisation of research, consultancy services, fields of research expertise, research degrees and initiatives intended to increase the profile of the university's research. Research centres and units are listed in the Directory category.

Examples of links in this category:

Academics & research	Research @ [name of university]
[name of university] research	Research activities
Research	Research areas
Research & centers	Research at [name of university]

RESEARCH CATEGORY

Research & commercialisation	Research degrees
Research & consultancy	Research Fellow Investment
Research & development	Teaching & research
Research & industry partners	Teaching & research education
Research & innovation	

COMMUNITY CATEGORY

In the Community category we placed links to sport, social and arts activities, community development, services for businesses and other information that seemed to be aimed at the university's local community. This category also includes information for potential donors to the university.

Examples of links in this category:

Arts	Industry/employers
Athletics	International visitors
Athletics & recreation	Life on campus
Benefactors	Metropolis
Campus in the city	Museums
Campus life	National capital
Campus services	Neighbors
Community	Partnerships
Community programs	Partnerships & community
Contribution & service	Public service/outreach
Corporate connections	State & community partnerships
Doing business with [name of university]	Student activities
Donations & bequests	Student life
Donors	Support SFU
Family & friends	Supporting Murdoch University
Friends & visitors	Supporting UBC
General public	The arts
Gifts to HKU	The City of Edinburgh
Giving to [name of university]	Town & gown
How to give to [name of university]	University town
Industrial liaison	UVA diversity
Industry & employers	[name of university] and its region
Industry collaboration	Visitors & the community
Industry liaison	[name of university] & Newhaven

ALUMNI CATEGORY

In the Alumni category we placed information for graduates of the university.

Examples of links in this category:

Alumni	Alumni, donors & friends
Alumni & community	Alumni, donors & parents
Alumni & donors	College/graduate
Alumni & friends	For alumni
Alumni & graduate students	For graduate students
Alumni & graduates	Glasgow graduates
Alumni & parents	Graduate & professional
Alumni & UNSW supporters	Graduates
Alumni (graduates)	Graduates/alumni
Alumni and friends	Graduates/productions
Alumni info	

NEWS CATEGORY

In the News category we placed links to news releases, newsletters and magazines, lists of experts available for media comment, and other information for journalists and editors.

Examples of links in this category:

Achievements	More ECU news
Announcement	News
Bulletins	News & events
Columbia news	News and events
Communication	News centre
ECU Update magazine	News review
Experience bank	News, events & notices
Expertise	News/events
Find UBC experts	Newsletter
Latest news	Noticeboard
Latest university briefing	Press
Media	Public & media
Media & marketing	Services for media
Media, news & events	UQ news

LINKS CATEGORY

In the Links category we placed links to consortiums, spin-off companies, research and business units with their own recognised name, and information about the university's links with external businesses.

Examples of links in this category:

AMC Search Ltd	English language institute
Archives Hunterian Museum & Art Gallery	Enterprise
Arecibo Observatory	External links
Associated institutions	Government
Bio 21	Government & business
Business	GraduateSchool.com
Business & community	Group of 8
Business & community links	Hawthorn English Language Centres
Business & government	Heritage Repertory Theatre
Business & industry	Johnson Art Museums
Business & services	Lab of Ornithology
Business and industry	Links
Business opportunities	Melbourne Business School
Business/community	Melbourne University Private
Commercial project	Monash commercial
Commercial services	National institutes
Council for the arts	Russell Group
Deakin Prime	Tech park
Desert Peoples Centre	Universitas 21
English language centre	Universitats Klinkum

LIBRARY CATEGORY

In the Library category we placed links to university libraries.

Examples of links in this category:

Libraries	Library catalogue (MUSE)
Libraries & computing	Library gateway
Libraries, museums, cultural attractions	Library services
Libraries/collections	NUS Libraries
Library	The library
Library & computing	UBC library
Library & computing services	

EMPLOYMENT CATEGORY

In the Employment category we placed links to lists of job vacancies, promotional material aimed at prospective employees, and career development information for current staff.

Examples of links in this category:

ATAS tutors wanted	Jobs
Careers & jobs	Jobs @ [name of university]
Contract	Jobs at [name of university]
Co-op employers	Jobs/careers
Employers	Professional development
Employment	Prospective staff
Employment @ [name of university]	Recruitment
Employment opportunities	Staff employment & development
Future staff	Staff vacancies
Human resources	Student employment
Job applicants	Talent recruitment
Job opportunities	Teaching at [name of university]
Job postings	Work with us
Job vacancies	Working at [name of university]

STUDENTS CURRENT CATEGORY

In the Students Current category we placed links to intranet pages for enrolled students. Typically these were generic in nature, but some home pages provided direct links to exam and subject timetables. There is little variation in link titles within this category: most home pages simply provide a link to "Current students".

Examples of links in this category:

Current students	Present students
Exam schedule	Subject timetables
For current students	Timetable wizard
For UVA students	

SERVICES CATEGORY

In the Services category we placed links to support services for students and staff, shops, medical and dental clinics on campus, and e-commerce facilities. See also the Campuses, Community and Directory categories.

Examples of links in this category:

Administrative services	Online services
Classified ads	Pay online
Consulting services	Services
Dental	Services & facilities
Facilities @ [name of university]	Services for business

SERVICES CATEGORY

Health & medical resources	Student & staff support
Health care	Student services
Health/medical center	Support
IST customer services	Support services
Medical	Technology support
Medical center	Textbooks (Uni Shop)
Merchandise	The Cornell store
Online payments 2004	

MANAGEMENT CATEGORY

In the Management category we placed strategic plans, organisational structure and governance, budget and policy information.

Examples of links in this category:

Academic calendar	Organisational divisions
Admin & governance	Our organisation
Admin contact	Planning, reporting and continuous quality improvement
Administration	Projects
Administration & calendars	Quality & improvement
Calendar	Strat vision
Calendars	Strategic directions
Environmental stewardship	Trek 2000: UBC's vision
Governance	[name of university] annual report
Management	[name of university] budget update
Organisation	Uni strat plan

QUALITY CATEGORY

In the Quality category we placed information about the university's approach to teaching students. There is little variation in link titles; "Teaching and learning" is a common phrase.

Examples of links in this category:

ANU education	Learning @ [name of university]
Education	Learning connection
ICT for teaching & learning	Teaching
Learning & teaching	Teaching & learning

STUDENTS INTERNATIONAL CATEGORY

In the Students International category we placed links to information specifically for international students. There is very little variation in these link titles: most simply say "International students", with no indication of whether the students are prospective or current, or their level of study (foundation/pre-university, undergraduate, postgraduate).

Examples of links in this category:

For international students
Immigration regulations FAQ
International student
International students
International students (Chinese)

EVENTS CATEGORY

In the Events category we placed links to specific campus-based events and to calendars of dates and events. Many home pages have a link to a combined news and events subsite: these are counted in the News category.

Examples of links in this category:

Ask Me day	NUS centennial
Conferences, seminars	Open Day
Conferences/events	Open day 8 September
Corporate events	Principal dates
Dates of semesters	Semester dates
Events	Things to do/UVA news
Events calendar	Today @ [name of university]
Important dates	Web spotlight
International Week	

WEB INFORMATION CATEGORY

In the Web Information category we placed help and FAQ pages, metadata about the university's web site, and mechanisms for commenting about the web site. See also the Directory category.

Examples of links in this category:

Browsers	Help info
Computing	Page info
FAQ	Referencing web site
For more key sites see Help	Web feedback form
Help	Web page feedback

STUDENTS CATEGORY

In the Students category we placed student-related links that do not differentiate between prospective and current students, or levels of study.

Examples of links in this category:

Australian & NZ students
[name of university] student academic awards
Rhodes Scholarship information seminars
Scholarships
Scholarships & funding
Student information
Students

INTERNATIONAL CATEGORY

In the International category we placed non-specific "International" links, plus links to information about the university's overseas connections or efforts to internationalise its curriculum. See also the International Students category.

Examples of links in this category:

International	International resources
International activities	Internationalisation
International development	Other languages
International links	Yale & the world
International relations	

STUDENTS NEW CATEGORY

In the Students New category we placed links to information specifically for students commencing their first year of study.

Examples of links in this category:

Commencement
First year @ [name of university]
New students
New undergrad admissions process
Orientation
Student orientation
Welcome, Class of 2008

In the Students Postgraduate category there are only two link titles, "Graduate students" and "Postgraduate students". These links do not distinguish between prospective, new and current enrolment status.

In the Other category we placed links that appeared to be university-specific jargon or miscellaneous content that appears only once, on a single university site.



Minerva Access is the Institutional Repository of The University of Melbourne

Author/s:

RUWOLDT, MARGARET; Spencer, Claire

Title:

Navigation and content on university home pages

Date:

2004-10

Citation:

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