Georgia Southern University
Digital Commons@Georgia Southern

3-5-2013

Clarification on web page control and template delays and design

Kathy Albertson
Georgia Southern University

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.georgiasouthern.edu/faculty-senate-index

🍥 Part of the Higher Education Administration Commons

Recommended Citation

Clarification on web page control and template delays and design

Submitted by Kathy Albertson

3/5/2013

Question:

As it stands now, I and many other faculty do not understand why we cannot have more control over our own websites. "We are supposed to be the experts in education," according to Dr. Keel, yet trying to include our students in genuine work that will build affinity and persistence (and therefore completion) has met a roadblock that is not the faculty's choice. Having a consistent template is understandable, but if we want to engage our students, why are they not helping us decide what that template contains and displays? Who makes this decision?

Rationale:

At the Feb. 20 Faculty Senate, "President Keel noted that CCG opens a 'Lot of exciting opportunities.' Our system goal is 250,000 more graduates by 2020, and to reduce the costs for each graduate. CCG 'is a done deal' It is not open for discussion: '. . . we can no longer claim that students are the only ones responsible for their own success. We are responsible for their success. The Board of Regents has made it plain that we are. The Governor has made it plain that we are. And, in fact, our budgets as early as FY '15 are formula funded . . . dependent entirely on the completion of goals that we set for our own Complete College Georgia. We are supposed to be the experts in education, and I will certainly think that collectively we have got to find some ways to help our students become more successful.' President Keel asked faculty to find ways in which we can do this, and the administration is looking at ways to ease the advising burden on faculty so that faculty can 'really focus on what [we] do best which is teaching and providing . . . lifelong career mentoring advice.'"

As faculty we want to engage our students, but at too many turns are hands (and our deans') are tied. Here is a recent example: In my Careers and Writing class, students submitted projects with a cover letter to explain and persuade the Writing & Linguistics program to use their ideas for PR on the major. Our website is horrible, as are many on campus, so several

students have created web overhauls (among other documents) to target the student audience, the parents, and others who need to understand more about what this major is (beyond the usual stereotypes of a path to teaching or writing poetry). The projects are engaging, and the students are not only engaged; they are invested. They want to help the program reach the public through the website.

I would like the marketing office, the provost, and the president to help faculty understand why we have had outdated, ineffective, website for years and then keep being told "it's coming; it's coming" when we have students who would love to "share the load" of this work and produce impressive, innovative artifacts. There may be a plan, but details are not being communicated clearly and consistently to the wider community of campus.

As an expert, I know that students need and desire to be engaged, and having them give guidance to what the world sees on our web is part of our responsibility in higher education.

Response:

This item was approved for inclusion on the agenda of the April 18 senate meeting, and directed to the vice president for Information Technology.

Update 4/17/2013: Christian Flathman, Associate Vice-president for Marketing and Communication, provided the following answer (see attached file for word format), taking into account input from Steve Burrell, VP for Information Technology and CIO, Ron Stalnaker, Director of Enterprise Application Services and Paul Reaves, Project Manager, University Web Team.

Request for Information Response:

The University has evolved its public website (www.georgiasouthern.edu) through many iterations of "facelifts", organization and content changes during the past several years. In the fall of 2010 the website consisted of more than 750,000 pages of information. The task of maintaining this public information was and remains daunting. While many well-intentioned efforts were made to modernize the website, the methods and tools in use by the institution were tedious, cumbersome and inefficient. The net result was an inconsistency in the quality and accuracy of what is arguably the institution's most important public document.

In March 2012, the University established a Web Advisory Committee (WAC) charged by by the VP for Information Technology and the VP for University Advancement to advise and support the University's web strategy. The WAC provides an open forum to engage

Marketing, IT Services, , web site contributors, and stakeholders from across campus in Georgia Southern's web efforts.

As part of the process of establishing the WAC, each Dean and VP was asked to assign a content owner and steward for their individual areas that would (1) be responsible and accountable for content (collecting, updating, publishing and deleting) and, (2) engage users throughout their college/division to update content and assist with the migration to a web Content Management System (CMS). In each College, the Dean's determined the resources, management structures and processes for collecting and updating web site information for their college.

The University's web strategy is designed with the goal of enlisting the help and input of department resources that are familiar with and responsible for department/college messages. The CMS provides content owners tasked with managing site content an easy to use and efficient tool for updating websites. The CMS includes institutionally developed design templates to ensure consistency of navigation, organization and appearances while providing flexibility in imagery and content. This follows established industry best practices used at other large complex higher education institutions. The Office of Marketing and Communications is responsible for establishing overall design of public web site design. Information Technology Services is providing technical assistance, training and project management services in support to the CMS deployment.

Several areas have completed the migration to the new CMS:

•   College of Health and Human Sciences (January 9, 2013)

•   Student Affairs and Enrollment Management (January 29, 2013)

•   Campus Recreation and Intramurals (March 5, 2013)

•   Allen E. Paulson College of Engineering and Information Technology (April 10, 2013)

•   College of Science and Mathematics (April 10, 2013)

The complete migration of other colleges and departments are anticipated in the coming months. The first priority in the migration is to move all public sites under www.georgiasouthern.edu and ensure accurate and timely updating of essential information. During this initial phase, limited enhancements to the underlying technology and website

capabilities will be considered. Once all domains are migrated onto the CMS, enhancements in design, navigation and features of the site will be considered and discussed in the WAC forum and prudent enhancements will be deployed to help ensure the institution maintains an intuitive, informative, accurate, and timely public web information service.

Website Control - Content Owners

For the past seven years, the University's website was maintained by more than 300 users. Unfortunately, if individual sites are out of date, they have not been managed by the individual users/departments during that time. This was one of the main reasons the University sought a content management system. As we planned the move to the new CMS system, we asked each college, division/unit to identify a content owner that would be the primary contact and be responsible for working with individual departments to ensure their content is up to date. Each college establishes the appropriate procedures for collecting, editing, and publishing web content in the CMS. This may involve multiple contributors, including faculty members who may contribute to the content of their department website.

The University has invested in establishing a Web development team that is responsible for implementing template designs, w institutional policies, and procedures to ensure a consistent implementation of the University's Web presence, design and brand. Each of the content owners, assigned by VPs and Deans, work in concert with two dedicated web technology developers, a content manager, and a CMS migration project manager. .

Web Advisory Committee

The VP for Information Technology and VP for University Advancement formed and charged a Web Advisory Committee (WAC) in March 2012 designed to provide individuals from across campus an open forum for discussing webs site topics and recommending changes to design, training, support mechanisms, organization and other issues related to ongoing development of the institution's public web presence. WAC participants were initially identified by VPs and Deans. Participants have been routinely encouraged to involve others in their area that wish to contribute to the discussions. A Google+ discussion group has been formed to foster discussion outside of meetings and as a community support tool for CMS users.

The WAC has been meeting monthly for more than a year. Participants provide updates on their areas, share best practices, solicit feedback and provide recommendations for overall web site direction. It is the appropriate forum for the discussion of anything pertaining to the web.

At the initial meeting in 2012, the vision for establishing a new institutional website strategy was discussed. The members of the WAC were introduced to the plan to utilize WordPress as Georgia Southern's institutional content management system. The committee was also advised that maintenance of the University's institutional WordPress themes would fall under the direction of the Office of Marketing and Communications to ensure consistency with institutional standards. Marketing and Communications is responsible for branding, presentation, and writing standards for the University and the web.

Content Management System (CMS)

The University has for the past year been working to update and move all of its website content into a content management system (WordPress) to address the issue of outdated content and to empower authorized contributors an efficient tool for maintaining website content. The motivation to utilize a CMS was based on numerous complaints from departments/units who expressed that they were unable to update their content due to lack of staff with web skillsets or time. The CMS enables departments to update websites as they would a Microsoft Word document without the requirement of having a highly technical skillset. Prior attempts to initiate web-changes involved labor-intensive efforts that were largely dependent on central resources and a specialized technical skillset. The CMS allows the University to quickly train and delegate authority and responsibilities to college/department resources to efficiently maintain content to ensure accuracy and timeliness of public information. The CMS also allows for incremental changes in design and template structure to be applied, without the need to completely rewrite a website. This allows for the planned evolution of websites without the necessity of rewriting or other disruptions.

Project Team & Progress

At the initial meeting of the WAC, participants were informed that each unit of the university that maintained a public web site would have a designated web content owner/manager.

This necessity was reiterated at each unit project kick-off meeting. As directed by the Dean or unit head, the web content owner is responsible for copying, creating, and proofreading all content for his or her unit's website(s). It is also the responsibility of the content owner to communicate with departments within the unit to coordinate timely migration of departmental content.

The first cohort of university units to begin the process of migrating to the WordPress platform included the College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences, the College of Health and Human Sciences, and the College of Graduate Studies. The initial meeting, called the "kick off meeting," was held on September 6, 2012.

Subsequent cohorts include: the Allen E. Paulson College of Engineering and Information Technology, the Jiann Ping-Hsu College of Public Health, the College of Business Administration, the College of Science and Mathematics, the College of Education, Zach S. Henderson Library, Academics, and Auxiliary Services.

Student Affairs and Enrollment Management also began their migration project in September 2012. Undergraduate Admissions went live on September 13, 2012.

Since that time the following domains have successfully migrated to the WordPress environment:

- College of Health and Human Sciences (January 9, 2013)

- Student Affairs and Enrollment Management (January 29, 2013) --

- Campus Recreation and Intramurals (March 5, 2013)

- Allen E. Paulson College of Engineering and Information Technology (April 10, 2013)

- College of Science and Mathematics (April 10, 2013)

Several units are still in the content production phase of their migration effort. This is understandable since these are additional duties to those already placed on the content owners and managers. Some units still in this phase include:

- Jack N. Averitt College and Graduate Studies (scheduled to go live in May 2013)

- Auxiliary Services (scheduled to go live in May 2013)

- College of Education (scheduled to go live in June 2013)

- Academics/Provost domain (scheduled to go live in July 2013)

- College of Business Administration (scheduled to go live in July 2013)

- Zach S. Henderson Library (scheduled to go live in August 2013)

- Jiann Ping-Hsu College of Public Health (scheduled to go live in August 2013)

Other units that are slated to begin work during the summer term include: Information Technology Services, Business and Finance, Physical Plant, and the main Georgia Southern website (.edu). Timelines for these units have not yet been established. Site map planning is underway for each of these.

All content owners are provided comprehensive training to ensure that all content owners and managers are properly versed on the CMS, creation of web pages, organization of content, search engine optimization, writing styles for the Web, design and content standards, and utilization analytics reporting among other related topics. The training is conducted by the Center for Academic Technology Support and follow-up/refresher training is also being made available upon request of a content owners.

Student Involvement

We have asked that each unit's primary content owner be a full-time university employee. The primary reason for having a primary content manager for each college/department/division is that the individual needs to be actively and engaged full-time on the operations and activities of the department.

Previously, numerous departments had assigned students of varying skillsets to maintain them resulting in numerous issues ranging from broken pages to spelling, punctuation, design and others. In some cases, when students graduated, sites went untouched and were not updated in a timely manner resulting in outdated content. In many of these cases, site usernames/passwords were shared or even lost creating security issues. We found that

many of the students that were actually being tasked with working on department sites, while interested in web design and development, did not have the proper training to manage official university sites which could negatively impact enrollment, student experience or reputation.

Based on these prior issues, and given our website's importance as the primary public document for a world-wide audience, the University made the decision to not provide students with the ability to create and publish content on its production web information servers.

That said, students are actively involved working as members of the University's Web team. They are working under the watchful eye of dedicated developers and designers who are coaching them on content management and web development and design standards. Students can provide content via a variety of mechanisms such as Google Docs, MS Word Documents, or other mechanisms that can be used in the development of site content. Other methods may also be available to students in the future.

Content Management

Our main issue with this project is not design or engaging students, it is content development, management and accountability by university departments and employees. By implementing the CMS, it will empower departments, colleges and divisions to write and update engaging content that they need to recruit and retain students.

Template Design

The University's Marketing & Communications team along with Information Technology, following approval from President's Cabinet, made the decision to move forward with moving the University's Web presence into WordPress. As part of this, a basic template was selected to minimize migration issues from the current site into the new system. Long term, the University's approach to the Web will be one of continuous improvement with the Office of Marketing & Communications, who is tasked with managing Georgia Southern's brand/look and feel, managing overall site design.

The days of website "redesigns" are long gone and ongoing modifications will be made based off of the metrics and data the web team and content managers receive from sites/pages.

Given this, future University-wide template modifications are planned with further design enhancements included. We agree that a more engaging design is necessary. However, at this time the University's primary focus must be on correcting and updating outdated content. In short, we are trying to get a process in place to manage content. This will enable the University to get everyone to the starting line before we start the race.

The University has an outstanding team of designers that is excited and ready to move forward with innovative web designs once the entire institution has been migrated into WordPress. The content owners are the key to current efforts as well as future management. They will help ensure Georgia Southern does not find its way back into this situation again.

Website Timing

As mentioned above, the University has in the past year invested in a dedicated Web team and created the Web Advisory Committee to help. Previously, there were no dedicated design or IT resources assigned to the project. The four individuals currently leading/working on the project as members of the web team have done an incredible amount of work to move the project forward and as a result numerous sites have been launched in WordPress. As content owners are completing content for the sites, they are scheduling those sites to move to production.

Further Questions

If faculty members have specific questions about their units' content, process or timing, we would encourage them to speak to their College Content Owner and/or Dean. We are confident they would welcome assistance from their colleagues.

College Content Owners:

COBA: Mark Donato (mdonato@georgiasouthern.edu) and Jamie Lane (jlane@georgiasouthern.edu)

CEIT: Sam Wainford (samwainford@georgiasouthern.edu)

CHHS: Alan Woodrum (alanwoodrum@georgiasouthern.edu)

Note: Alan remains the contact until his replacement is identified following his recent move to a new position in the Provost's office.

CLASS: Andrea Bennett (abennett@georgiasouthern.edu)

COE: Mary Egger (megger@georgiasouthern.edu)

COGS / VP Research and Economic Development: Jeb Barger (jbarger@georgiasouthern.edu)

COSM: Melissa Gast-Goodman (mgoodman@georgiasouthern.edu)

JPHCOPH: Ruth Whitworth (rewhitworth@georgiasouthern.edu)

Library: David Lowder (dlowder@georgiasouthern.edu)

University Web Team

Paul Reaves, Project Manager

Doy Cave, Content Manager

Rebekah Hickey, Web Developer

Keely Hopkins, Web Developer

The team works closely with Ron Stalnaker, Director of Enterprise Application Services and Christian Flathman, Assoc. VP Marketing & Communications.

Senate Response: Minutes 4/18/2013: RFI: Clarification on web page control and template delays and design: Moderator Mynard noted that the lengthy administrative reply had been posted.

Robert Costomiris (CLASS) noted that the lengthy reply was poorly formatted and opined that might have something to do with our web design. He then asked what

timeline we had by which everything will be in order on our websites. His department [Literature and Philosophy] had been in limbo on redesigning their website for a long time, and answers to questions never resolve in getting the website to integrate into the system that is being devised here. Mynard thought there was some element of response to that question in the lengthy answer, but he was having trouble finding it. Provost Bartels said the roll out for the web page to move onto the new product that we are using was a roll out by the divisions. Academic Affairs and all its units expect to be live online by July 1st.

Janice Steirn (CLASS) asked if the list of units and rollout dates in the response to the RFI was exhaustive because she could not find CLASS, though she might have missed it in all that text. Her concern "that the way things tend to work, I am worried that by the time we get almost to the bottom of the list, they'll decide to change it to something else. You know. Because computers change."

Helena Hernandez (CLASS) noted that each college has somebody representing them on a council [Web Advisory Council or WAC)] for websites. For CLASS, that is Andrea Bennett in the Dean's office, whom faculty can contact. Also, each department has somebody working on their websites and faculty should be able to check with their department chairs. Websites should be ready by July 1st; if they are not, they'll be blank. Steirn asked if everyone had to use a really specific template, and if so, whether that was available to everybody. Hernandez said the specific template is WordPress and it is available to the people that are taking care of the websites.

Provost Bartels added that WordPress will allow much quicker, more efficient updating of materials that are on the websites, so that while we'll use a similar template so we have similar look, we'll have a lot more opportunity at the local level in colleges and departments to actually make sure that the information that is there is accurate, and we can update and add to it much more promptly. This will let us demonstrate our resources to others that are out there.