AS&E Website Recommendations

Overview

Recommendations for AS&E websites

The recommendations outlined in this section were developed to help improve consistency in navigation and content for AS&E websites. There are six primary recommendations as well as sections on content strategies and best practices, along with the AS&E web style guide created by our group and University Communications.

Who are the recommendations for?

The recommendations in this section apply to all websites within Arts, Sciences & Engineering at the University of Rochester. They were developed in conjunction with the Deans' Office and a faculty committee.

Why are the recommendations important?

The main goal of these recommendations is to improve website navigation and content throughout Arts, Sciences & Engineering in a way that is attainable to provide a consistent experience for the user.

What are the recommendations?

The recommendations include adoption of standard elements such as:

- A search function throughout the site
- A link back to the University home page and the respective school home page
- A standard set of navigational headings across department websites
- Easy-to-find contact information for the department

Website Elements

The recommendations for required elements listed below aim to improve consistency in website navigation and content. There are six primary recommendations that include adoption of standard elements such as:

- A site-wide search function
- A link back to the University and respective school home pages
- A standard set of navigational headings
- Specific and consistent faculty/staff information
- Easy-to-find contact information

A list of web browsers and mobile devices that sites should be tested against for compatibility issues are also provided. It is recommended that sites be designed with mobile devices in mind.

1. Department home pages

Each department home page should feature the following elements:

- Site-wide search
- Link back to the College and either the School of Arts & Sciences or Hajim School of Engineering home page
- Link back to the University home page
- Approved University, SAS, or Hajim logo (see Creative Services)

2. Top-level navigation

Individual department websites should feature a top-level* navigation scheme that is persistent throughout the site. Uniformity in menu titles is key to providing easy, consistent navigation for the wide range of users of our websites.

We recommend using the following menu titles:

- About Us
- People (includes faculty, staff, and students if applicable)
- Undergraduate
- Graduate
- Research
- News & Events

*Top-level does not refer to the location of the navigation bar, but instead refers to striving for consistent and relevant navigation menu titles. Individual departments may have a need for additional menu items besides the ones listed above.

3. Faculty pages

Every faculty member should have a departmental page within the People area of the department's site. The faculty person's page should include:

- Name and title
- Contact information (phone, email, office location)
- A current photo
- Highest degree earned
- Current research interests and a research overview
- Updated list of selected papers/publications
- Current or representative list of courses taught
- Awards/honors
- A downloadable CV (pdf)

A brief bio can also be included. Personal faculty websites should be a link on this page, not a substitute for the departmental faculty web page.

4. Contact information

On the department home page, a "Contact Us" area should be included with the mailing address and department phone number. If an email address is to be included, it should be a department email address, not an individual's email address.

5. Web browser and device support

All websites should be tested in the following browsers and devices:

- Android
- Chrome
- Edge
- Firefox
- Internet Explorer 8+
- iPhone
- iPad
- Opera
- Safari

6. Mobile devices

As the portion of traffic to our websites from mobile devices increases, each department should have a plan for how their site functions in mobile devices. Sites should be tested in a variety of mobile devices to identify problem areas.

Content Strategies

Content strategy involves identifying the type of content that will best enable you to communicate to your online audience. The information below will help you to create and publish useful, usable content.

A content strategy defines:

- Key themes and messages
- Recommended topics
- Content purpose

Define your audience

The most important question to ask and answer for any website is: "Who is the most important audience for this web page or site?"

For example, for the University's home page, the most important audiences are those who are not already familiar with the University—those for whom the website will be their first impression of the University.

For Arts, Sciences & Engineering websites, the most important audiences should be: (listed in no particular order)

- Prospective undergraduate students
- Prospective graduate students
- Current students
- Current faculty and staff
- Parents of prospective and current students
- Alumni

Conduct a content audit

Each department should conduct a content audit of their existing site. The aim is to identify where each piece of content on each page came from—who requested it, who wrote it, who added it to the site—and when it was last updated. Audits also identify problem areas (misspellings, dead links) and content gaps that could possibly be filled.

Write for the web

Recommended reading: *Letting Go of the Words: Writing Web Content that Works* by Janice (Ginny) Redish

Web content is a conversation. When online, people tend to skim and scan to find and understand the information they need.

Answer your site visitors' questions

For every topic on your site, think about what people who are visiting your site want to know about that topic. Then think about how to give them that information as clearly and concisely as possible.

Let your site visitors "grab and go"

Here's how:

- Break your text into short sections with clear headings
- Start with key messages (i.e., "front-loading" the content)
- Write short sentences and short paragraphs (a one sentence paragraph is fine)
- Use lists and tables
  - Bulleted lists for items or options
  - Numbered lists for instructions
  - Write and insert meaningful links
  - Illustrate your content (with photos and captions)

Additional writing tips:

- Write in the active voice (most of the time)
- Use plain language
- Use verbs for action instead of nouns (e.g., "He denied…" instead of "He issued a denial…")
- Remember parallelism (humans like patterns)

- Cut unnecessary words
- Use the inverted pyramid style (key message should be first)
- Talk to your site visitors by using "you" (and "we," if appropriate) in the copy to draw the reader into the conversation
- Avoid overly long or clever page titles, section headings, etc.

For more writing tips and guidelines see the AS&E web style guide.

Encourage further use

What do you want people to be able to do on your site? Apply for a program? Contact faculty? Subscribe to a newsletter? Follow your social media accounts?

Think about the questions your site visitors have. Be sure to answer them, while using tone and style to engage your site visitors.

Remember: Give your site visitors what *they* need. And keep in mind how *they* access your content, from computer screens to mobile devices.

See also: Web Writing Guidelines (pdf)

Web Accessibility

Content on all Arts, Sciences & Engineering (AS&E) websites should be accessible to everyone. Below are some steps you can take to help make sure that everyone has equal access to our sites.

Images

Images with text, like posters or infographics are inaccessible to unsighted visitors. By law everything that is available to sighted users must also be available to unsighted users. Therefore, any information that is displayed in an image must also be written out in the text on the page.

If the image is also a link, then the link destination should be described in the alt text.

Alt text (image description)

To make images accessible to people who are visually impaired, it's important to always include "alt text." Alt text is used by screen readers to explain what the image shows.

When writing alt text, you want to provide a concise but complete description of what is in the image. You can leave out phrases like "photo of" or "image of" because the alt text implies this already. Some screen readers cut off alt text after 125 characters, so it's important to keep your description to that character count or less, if possible. We also suggest using a period at the end of alt text so that the screen reader pauses before continuing to the rest of the content.

Alt Text Example

Ok: Photo of student

Better: Student in the library.

Best: University of Rochester English major poses in Rush Rhees Library between bookshelves.

Links

Screen readers read out all the text verbatim, including URLs. To create a better user experience for those with screen readers, it's important to use meaningful hyperlinks instead of spelling out URLs. You'll also want to keep hyperlinked text to 100 characters or less to make sure they're accessible to screen readers.

Screen readers also can read all the hyperlinks, allowing unsighted users to "scan" the web page. To make this feature useful to non-sighted readers, we suggest avoiding "here" and "click here" links as they don't tell the user where the link goes. Creating

meaningful hyperlinks helps sighted users as well because it allows them to quickly scan the page for important links.

Here are some examples for how to rewrite "here" and "click here" links:

- Instead of "you can apply to Rochester by <u>clicking here</u>" try:
  - <u>Apply to Rochester online</u>!
- Instead of "to see a full description of services <u>click here</u>" try:
  - For more information about our services, check out the <u>Complete Service Description</u> (PDF).
- Instead of "<u>click here to register</u>" try:
  - <u>Register online</u> through our secure system.

Tables

In AS&E, our content management system applies the proper "markup" or coding to help make tables accessible to non-sighted readers. If you're coding a table using HTML or using a different system, you'll want to make sure it's coded properly so that non-sighted readers can access it. <u>WebAIM's creating accessible tables page</u> is a great resource for properly coding tables.

In addition to being coded properly, all tables should include a caption. The caption should be a short heading for the table content.

To add a caption to a table in Cascade, click on the Accessibility tab that comes up on the screen after you click "Check Content and Submit". Under Actions click Fix and enter your table heading.

Videos

All videos used on the AS&E pages must be captioned and use an accessible video player like YouTube. If you're using auto-generated closed captioning, be sure to review the captions for accuracy before adding the captioned video to your website.

We also suggest providing a transcript and <u>audio description</u> to help ensure that everyone can experience the content in the video.

Interested in learning more? The University of Washington has a great page about <u>creating accessible videos</u>.

If you need assistance in uploading videos in YouTube, University IT provides an uploading service for a small fee. Submit a help request to univithelp@rochester.edu.

If you need assistance in captioning videos, University IT recommends rev.com for captioning services.

PDFs

Many PDFs aren't accessible to screen readers at all, and even ones that are accessible can be difficult to use. We recommend limiting PDF use, but if a PDF is needed, they must be accessible.

Creating an accessible PDF starts at the document stage. When writing your document, you'll want to use:

- Meaningful hyperlinks
- Alt text on your images
- Page breaks rather than tabbing to the next page
- Headings, following a consistent heading hierarchy
- Simple tables

Once the document has been created be sure to save as a PDF. Saving allows screen readers to access the code in the original document. If you use print as a PDF instead it will strip all this code away, making the content inaccessible to a screen reader.

For more information about making a PDF more accessible see SiteImprove's How to Create Accessible PDF article.

Headings

Section, page title, and heading tags tell non-sighted users how content is organized on a page. Therefore, it's important to use tags appropriately for information hierarchy rather than just visual emphasis.

For example, you wouldn't want to use a heading tag to highlight an application deadline. You also wouldn't want to use bolding in place of a heading tag because this would get skipped when a screen reader "scans" the headings and won't have the same orientation effect as a heading would.

Best Practices

Tracking and performance

Each department website should provide some means of tracking visits to the site. The recommended method for collecting user and visit information is Google Analytics. There is a main University account that can be added to each site, and then a separate report for that site can be provided. All sites using the AS&E web template automatically have Google Analytics for the site.

Accessibility

All University department websites should meet basic accessibility guidelines for users with disabilities. Test your sites against a validator like <u>WAVE</u> to identify any accessibility problems that need fixing.

Templates

The standard Arts, Sciences & Engineering template is available for all academic and administrative departments within AS&E. This template is also available for faculty lab sites and research centers.

Logos

For guidelines on how to apply the approved versions of the University's logo, see the <u>guidelines and downloads web page</u>.

Remember, the logo is not synonymous with a header or headline. It does not need to be the biggest, most prominent element on the site. For example, it is often appropriate to use the logo in a footer, or as a secondary element in a header.

Web Editing Procedures

Roles

One person can fill multiple roles. We suggest that the reviewer and backup editor be the same person to give the backup editor more opportunities to access the system. The editor cannot also be the reviewer or backup editor.

Approver: Makes final approval on what content should go on the website, and if the suggested placement is appropriate.
Contributor: Suggests and/or writes content for the website.
Reviewer: Reviews content for grammar, spelling, and style.
Editor: Inputs content into the WCMS.
Backup Editor: Inputs content into the WCMS when the editor is out of the office.

Procedure: content requests/updates	
Contributor	Choose the most fitting option for your group. Only one option should be chosen. • Option 1: Emails update to editor, include page(s) and location(s) • Option 2: Notifies editor of update during staff meeting, include page(s) and location(s)
Editor	Updates WCMS content and publishes updated content.
Editor	Notifies contributor that updated content is now live.

Procedure: small updates*	
Contributor	Sends suggested content to the approver and requests that it be put on the website and suggests location.

Role	Description
Approver	Approves or denies the content request based on overall website goals and target audience. • If approved: Emails editor the content with any additional suggestions or recommendation for implementation, including deadlines. Contributor is cc. • If denied: Email contributor reason for denial.
Editor	Reworks content using web best practices and style guide standards. Emails the updated content to the reviewer (we suggest using Word documents at this stage so you can use track changes).
Reviewer	Reviews reworked content for grammar, spelling and style, making updates as needed. Emails the editor a copy of the changes or notifies them that the content has been reviewed.
Editor	Looks over reviewer's changes. Inputs final version into the WCMS and publishes.
Editor	Notifies the contributor and approver that the updated content is now live.

*Small updates include the following:

• Name changes
• Contact information changes
• Title changes
• Staff/faculty added or removed
• Correcting spelling, grammar, or style errors
• Updating dates, deadlines, and costs

Web Style Guide

This guide provides style rules for AS&E web communications to help foster consistency across AS&E's web presence.

In general, the University of Rochester recommends that all publications follow the guidelines in the Chicago Manual of Style and The Merriam-Webster Dictionary.

The AS&E Web Style Guide is updated regularly to match current University Communications guidelines, web best practices, and users' needs. If you have tips or words that you think should be added here, please contact us at aseweb@rochester.edu.

See the online web style guide for formatting, writing, branding, and other web-related resources.