

Building Effective Web Resources for Graduate Recruiting and Retention

Council of Graduate Schools Annual Meeting, Dec. 5, 2007

Whether for recruitment, admissions, outreach or student communication, the Web can help you advance the goals of your graduate institution. But to make the Web your ally, you must carefully plan the structure and functionality of both your Graduate School Web site and the sites of your departments.

Checklist for Good Graduate School and Departmental Web sites:

- Identify the department and university
- Organize content effectively and get rid of outdated information
- Provide easy-to-find contact information (header or footer)
- Provide clear instructions on how to apply to your programs
- Convey what degrees are offered and the admissions requirements
- List faculty and their research interests (department sites)
- Make accessible to handicapped users (with XHTML and CSS)

4 Steps to a Redesigned Web site:

1. Conduct a comprehensive site inventory and category analysis
 - › Research the ways students, faculty and staff use the site and the kinds of information they desire.
2. Design with XHTML, CSS, Web Standards and best practices
 - › This will improve your site's usability, accessibility, search engine findability, ease of updates and design changes, and offer future possibilities with Microformats and a semantic Web.
3. Write/rewrite content for the Web
 - › People scan the Web for information relevant to their own needs. Use bullets and subheads, write with the student/user in mind, not the dean, and lose the acronyms. Remember, users of your site might not know the way a school's programs or departments are organized, so structure information in a way that anyone could figure it out.
4. Test your site with actual users
 - › Get real users to perform real tasks and tackle real problems as you observe and take notes.

What Graduate Deans Can Do to Encourage Effective Department Web sites:

- Ensure that the Graduate School Web site provides support to departments
- Hold workshops on building effective graduate Web sites
- Provide templates of graduate department Web sites
- Offer options for Web support that are consistent with campus culture
- Ask departments to identify individuals responsible for graduate updates on the Web site
- Convince departments that graduate students use the Web
- Encourage departments to investigate how students get information about their programs (how is the Web used at each step in the recruiting process)
- Recognize model graduate department Web sites
- Show departments how to do user testing on their Web sites

