



# CONTENT STRATEGY

FAIRMONTSTATE.EDU



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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report contains a proposed content strategy for the new design of *Fairmont State University's (FSU)* website (**fairmontstate.edu**). The strategy was developed to align content with business goals that relate to increasing overall enrollment at the university – the main reason for redesigning the site as stated in the project's request for proposal (RFP). These business goals were identified as:

- Increase the number of students who apply to *FSU*
- Increase the percentage of admitted students who enroll
- Improve retention of current students

An audit of *FSU*'s current site and content was conducted, including a focus on search engine optimization, accessibility, architecture, writing, and social media. Based on this audit it was determined that current site content does not align with business goals or the goals of primary user groups: prospective, admitted, and current students and their families. Some content from the site and social media will be able to be repurposed for the new site, but a significant investment in content editing and creation will be needed to ensure this problem does not continue following the redesign. Notably, photography, videos, and a consistent writing style will need to be a focus for this content build.

Based on these findings from the content alignment a list of recommendations for improving *FSU* content were created, including:

- Focus more on storytelling and the people of *FSU*
- Show, don't just tell about the *FSU* experience
- Leverage social media and quality user-generated content
- Help users find and focus on the content they need and want quickly

To guide the content that will need to be created to enact this strategy, this report contains the following resources:

- **Core Content Strategy:** the strategy summarized  
To increase enrollment we will provide informative, inspiring, and approachable content that helps students and their families feel certain about choosing *FSU* and supported from their first visit through commencement and beyond.

- **Messaging Framework:** the desired reaction of users to content
  - First Impression: This seems like the right place for me.
  - Value Statement: I feel empowered because I can find and understand information that helps me take action.
  - Proof: They get what someone like me needs in order to successfully pursue a degree.

The beginning of a content design to support this content strategy can be found in this report as well – a prioritization table, a content model, a site map, and wireframes of core pages. These assets will continue to develop as the site redesign progresses but should be reexamined as changes and compromises are necessitated to ensure the final product aligns with the strategy as intended.

A list of key performance indicators (KPIs) was defined to help *FSU* track the success of this content strategy and identify when changes in content are necessary. The KPIs suggested in this report are:

- Number of site interactions between admissions and users
- Click-through rate for admitted students communications
- Top reasons students leave *FSU* and the traffic to pages with content related to these reasons

In order to implement this strategy, *FSU* will need to undertake a number of next steps in preparation to support content creation, the content lifecycle, and establish content authority for the site. These include:

- Content management model: choose the structure in which content will be produced and published
- Roles & Responsibilities: assign who does what in the content creation process
- Publishing Process Workflow: define a workflow for the creation process
- Content Inventory: evaluate current site content and decide what can stay, what needs editing, and what cannot be repurposed for the new site
- Style Guide: create a shareable, easy-to-understand document about how site content should be written to maintain consistent tone, voice, and grammar
- Editorial Plan: establish a calendar to know how and when content will be published on the site

# INTRODUCTION

This report encompasses a proposed content strategy for an upcoming redesign of the *Fairmont State University (FSU)* website (**fairmontstate.edu**). A content strategy is a planned approach for how to use content to achieve business goals. Without a content strategy, the goals of a site redesign risk going unachieved. While a redesign project may produce a brand new, beautiful container, users will still not take desired actions that support business goals if what's placed in that container is unappealing, misaligned with user needs, or hard to find.

In the RFP for the *FSU* site project, the stated purpose of a redesign is to better use the site as a "primary marketing tool" with the desired goal being increased enrollment. This content strategy offers direction for how to use content to make sure the new site is aligned with and supporting this goal. It also touches on other stated concerns about navigation and effective calls to action, which the RFP outlines as weaknesses of the current site that must be solved in the new one.

In order to develop this content strategy, a content audit and alignment were conducted on the current *FSU* site. Content was examined for whether it followed best practices and aligned with the 3 following **business goals** that support the overall goal of increasing enrollment:

- Increase the number of students who apply to *FSU*
- Increase the percentage of admitted students who enroll
- Improve retention of current students

Based on these goals a list of content objectives was developed and the **primary user groups** for the site were identified:

- Prospective Students
- Admitted Students
- Current Students
- Parents, Families, Loved Ones of Prospective Students
- Parents, Families, Loved Ones of Admitted Students
- Parents, Families, Loved Ones of Current Students

When conducting the audit and alignment, user goals for visiting the site were considered alongside business goals in evaluating the content. It's important in a content strategy to consider both user and business needs or else content may not appeal to users or content may never produce desired actions in users.

A thorough examination of site and social media content — including a focus on architecture, writing, and a review of search engine optimization and accessibility elements using Screaming Frog's SEO Spider application — was conducted to determine if current content aligned with business goals.

The findings from the content alignment helped to spur the creation of a list of **recommendations** and direction for the new site's content strategy. A **core strategy statement** and a **messaging framework** were included to guide further evaluation of existing content and development of new content.

A competitive analysis of other university websites was completed in order to identify opportunities for new *FSU* site content and design. Discoveries from this process helped to inform the preliminary content design found in this report, including a prioritization table, a content model, a site map, and wireframes.

The beginning of a **writing style guide** was also developed and included in this report and **key performance indicators** were identified to track the success of this strategy following implementation. This report concludes with a list of required **next steps** for staff at *FSU* to complete in order to successfully move forward with this strategy.



# GOALS & OBJECTIVES

## Business Goals

Based on the goals of using the website as "the primary marketing tool" and the university's brand "to strategically increase enrollment" as outlined in the RFP the following business goals were identified as being most relevant to website content.

- **Increase the number of students who apply to FSU**

The first step to increasing enrollment is getting more potential students interested enough to complete the application process. *FSU* welcomes all kinds of students from non-matriculating ones interested in individual courses to transfers from other institutions and those beginning their undergraduate or graduate degrees. Making sure the school is appealing, both academically and socially, and that the application process is easy to understand and access no matter what type of student is key. If the website is to be a marketing tool then its content can and should be able to help with this goal.

- **Increase the percentage of admitted students who enroll**

Once students have received an offer of admission, *FSU* must still be able to compete with other institutions they have offers from to win them over. Although admissions events and communications play a role, students and their families are likely to do a deeper dive into online content, both on the website and social media, to measure the value of the education, see what they can expect as a student, and generally get a feel for whether they'll fit academically and socially. Website content can help students get excited, see themselves at *FSU*, and recognize the advantages it has over competitors.

- **Improve retention of current students**

Once students are enrolled they will likely have access to additional internal communications and information. However, for them and their families, especially at first, the website will still be their go-to reference. Whether it be how to pay a bill, apply for financial aid, find academic support, or research dorms and courses for next year, clear, easy-to-find, and informative website content can improve the student experience by reducing stressors and information gaps that lead some students to disengage and leave.



## Content Objectives

For each of the above business goals, a short list of content objectives was developed. These are the specific ways in which website content can contribute toward achieving these 3 business goals. Current content was examined for whether it was fulfilling these objectives from the perspective of the organization's audience.

Business Goals	Content Objectives
Increase the number of students who apply to <i>FSU</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Connect prospective students to degree programs of most interest</li> <li>• Clearly communicate the application and financial aid process</li> </ul>
Increase the percentage of admitted students who enroll	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demonstrate the value of an <i>FSU</i> education</li> <li>• Share about the student experience and community</li> </ul>
Improve retention of current students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Connect students with the resources they need to stay engaged and succeed</li> <li>• Help students and their families easily navigate the college experience from first day to commencement</li> </ul>

Table 1: Business goals and content objectives for *FSU* site content.

# ABOUT THE AUDIENCE

## Primary User Groups

The *FSU* website serves a spectrum of different user groups. For this strategy, the following list of groups was the focus. Content must meet the needs of these types of users in order to support the aforementioned 3 business goals. Each of these user groups can also be related to multiple business goals. For example, admitted students and their families can both be involved in deciding which school a student chooses to enroll in.

- Prospective Students
- Admitted Students
- Current Students
- Parents, Families, Loved Ones of Prospective Students
- Parents, Families, Loved Ones of Admitted Students
- Parents, Families, Loved Ones of Current Students

## User Goals

Each of the above user groups may have a number of overlapping reasons for visiting the *FSU* website. The following user goals were identified as being the most related to the targeted business goals.

- Explore academic programs and degrees the university offers
- Find out admissions requirements, deadlines, and process
- Learn how much *FSU* will cost, how to apply for financial aid, and pay bills
- See what campus life is like, including facilities, residential life, and student services
- Find courses, degree requirements, and academic support resources
- Learn about campus events, organizations, and programming

# CURRENT CONTENT

## Content Types & Uses

The site content is primarily concerned with being informative. This is done mostly through text. Content, though, is not organized well as paragraphs, headings, calls to action, and other text-based content bleeds into each other creating messy pages filled with blocks of text that are not consistently formatted. Paragraphs are kept short, but the lack of clear hierarchy still makes it difficult to scan and pick out even key action-oriented information.

Some pages, such as the homepage and admissions landing page, feature multiple photos, but in general, most pages feature none. The photos themselves are spotty in quality with a good-deal being unprofessional and low-quality with no consistent style. Videos are almost non-existent on the site.

In general, the site suffers significantly from a **lack of visual storytelling and portrayal of the energy of the university community**. There are some news articles, but no central place to locate them, and there is little connection with students, faculty, staff, or alumni through stories, quotes, photos, and videos that shows the human element of the university. This relatable or aspirational type of content helps users emotionally connect with *FSU* and be able to see themselves as part of the community.

## Content Distribution

*FSU* uses a number of social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube) to share and increase the discoverability of the site's content. News articles and student information are the subjects of posts on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram that often link back to the site. The few videos embedded on the site are hosted on YouTube making them discoverable through that platform. *FSU* also distributes content and drives traffic to the site via various email lists for different users that are available for sign-up on the site. Other marketing efforts, such as digital and print advertisements, are responsible as well for driving traffic.

## Observations: Website Content

In general, the *FSU* site content is utilitarian and lackluster. Most of the content is intended for the core user groups of students and families as outlined in this report, which is good. However, a combination of an overzealous and inconsistent attempt to focus on the facts with unorganized page designs and lack of visual storytelling causes the site to fail to be either a marketing tool or a reference tool.

For example, the site features a header menu with customized categories for students and parents, but these offer only landing pages that are essentially link farms. While it is important not to have marketing content get in the way of users finding what they need, these pages do not offer a good first impression. A bunch of information is just slung at users instead of them feeling like the university wants to curate it for their specific needs. The site should **communicate the same involved spirit users would experience on campus or person-to-person**.

## Examples



Figure 1: The Current Students page. Gathering so many links like this in one place is overwhelming and feels like this page is trying to provide everything for everybody all at once. Users on the site often have to weed through a lot of good information rather than be guided quickly to what they need at the moment.

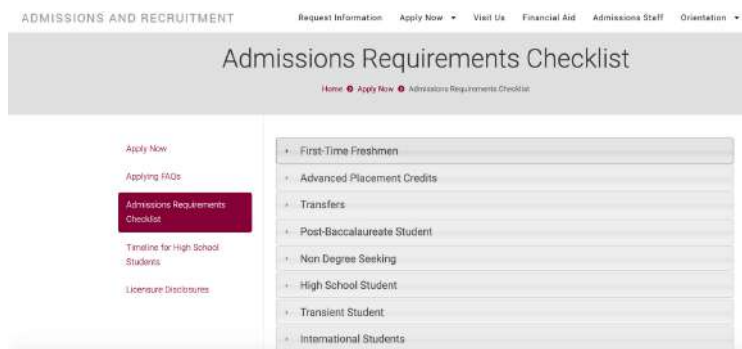


Figure 2: This admissions checklist is a better example of how to help users get right to the information they need while still showing that the university is invested in the student experience. All information is still on the page, but organized and presented with more care using the accordions. Although, better visual design could still help.

In terms of information on the academic program offerings, site content is once again not presented in an appealing manner. Most program pages are text only with few, if any photos. The content doesn't really counsel or explain to users unfamiliar with a subject whether this might be a program for them. The pages generally list what students will study, which may in some cases mean nothing to many first-generation students and their families, and the possible careers they could have. This content is very informative, but not nurturing or accessible to all.

The site, in general, needs to **show rather than just tell**. Students want to see what it's like in labs and classrooms, what kinds of projects they'll work on, the internship experiences they'll have, and what alumni are doing with their educations. All the basic information about programs isn't even on the pages. For example, what courses are part of programs is only available via linked PDFs of sample course schedules, which are not accessible on assistive devices used by users with disabilities.

Many students, even after they enroll, are unsure about what they want to study and feel pressure about making such a big financial commitment. They may also feel uncomfortable seeking out academic advice. Site content should enable them to make better, more informed, and more confident decisions. This, in turn, helps increase applications, enrollment, and retention.

## Examples



Figure 3: An example of the top of a program page. These random call outs are at the top of every program page, but they are just marketing clutter. Users don't know what these tangibly mean. It would be better to show examples of students actually doing these things.

Figure 4: The residential life pages do a slightly better job of making this aspect of college transparent and accessible for all by showing photos from inside dorm rooms and providing floor plans. Better quality photos and the addition of videos or other interactive media could still help.

As was mentioned previously, the human interest element of *FSU* is significantly missing from the site's content. There are some news stories available on school landing pages and references to something called *FSU Now*, but there is no central location for users to go to find all news, events, and interesting stories related to the *FSU* community. There is a campus calendar under "Campus Life" and a news section at the bottom of the homepage, but the news page itself only has the last 6 stories published with no way to access older articles. Even on article pages, there are not links to related or recommended stories. The focus of the articles is also very institutional – scholarships, donations, awards. They do not really portray the active, regular campus community or the lives of its people.

Doing so can be helpful to prospective and admitted students and their families because it gives them another glimpse into the experience they could be a part of. It adds value to the prospect of going to *FSU*. For current students, it helps them to find out about opportunities to be involved, which can help with retention. Their families can also feel a little more connected to the experiences their students are having in college and make them more likely to be proud advocates for *FSU*.

## Examples



Figure 5: The News section on the homepage. The topics of the articles feel institutional and visually the photos are not appealing or sized for the site. There is also no other way to get to the news page than through this link.

## Fairmont State Engineering Technology Students Draft State Infrastructure Report Card



Figure 6: A better example of a community focused article. This was found on the College of Science and Technology's landing page and shares about the educational experience, how students are getting real-world skills, and spending their time at *FSU*.



One of the most intimidating and worrying parts of going to college for students and their families is cost. The cost of college can be notoriously murky with everyone paying slightly different amounts due to financial aid, residency, specific program fees, and meal plan and dorm selections. No one wants a surprise bill or to realize they've missed a deadline for financial aid applications.

FSU's site content actually doesn't do a terrible job of trying to share this information. For example, there is an interactive price chart, pictured below, that users can easily select and toggle between residency and degree levels to see the different estimated base costs of attendance.

The content also includes a price calculator that helps users get a more personal picture of what FSU will cost them as well as links to many external, helpful resources for financial aid, types of aid available, and requirements for federal and state aid. The calculator, though, is hidden at the bottom of the page and the external resources and other information are just a giant list in a side menu. The cost and aid section could be better organized to provide more guidance to make sure users are connecting with what applies to them best just like how the price chart helps them quickly identify the costs that apply to them.

## Examples

Undergraduate Students		Graduate Students	
In State	Out of State	Metro	
Direct Costs	Living with Relative	Living On/Off Campus	
Tuition & Fees	\$7,738	\$7,738	
Room & Board *	\$3,650	\$9,730	
Sub Total Direct	\$11,388	\$17,468	
Indirect Costs			
Books & Supplies	\$1,000	\$1,000	
Transportation	\$1,500	\$1,000	
Personal	\$1,000	\$1,000	
Sub Total Indirect	\$3,500	\$3,000	
Total	\$14,888	\$20,468	

\* Fees based on double occupancy rate and 15 meals per week. Cost may vary based on selection.  
 Note: all fees are for academic year 2020-2021 and are subject to change.

Figure 7: The interactive price chart that helps users zero in quickly on what their general cost would be. This good tool is a little buried in the financial aid section. FSU markets its value. Having this more upfront to take out the guesswork for users could help increase applications.

## Net Price Calculator

Fairmont State is pleased to provide the student aid calculator to assist you in estimating your costs to attend FSU. Results are based on 2020-2021 Estimated Cost of Attendance figures and student aid eligibility requirements which are subject to change. These results should assist you in determining an estimate of your out-of-pocket expense to attend Fairmont State.



Figure 8: FSU's price calculator that can help users get an idea of what they might expect in aid and cost. Once again this is a good marketing and informational tool that should be more prominent than it is.



## Observations: Social Media Content

*FSU*'s social media content does a better job than the website of showing and not just telling about the student experience and university community in that it heavily utilizes photos, graphics, and videos. This also enables a more exciting and varied portrayal of the university brand and what it means to be a falcon.

Instagram is doing the best job in terms of showing glimpses into life at *FSU* that current students can relate to, their parents and families can be engaged by, and prospective and admitted students can aspire to. It provides a nice mix of general, evergreen brand content with community storytelling and a bit of informational content. This allows for this platform to speak to both internal audiences (current students and families) and external audiences (prospective and admitted students and their families).

The storytelling done by the post below with the truck is a good example of the type of content both social media and the website could benefit from. It connects users with an individual student instead of just the university in general and drives users back to the website.

### Examples



Figure 9: Instagram post with a good example of community storytelling and connecting social media and the site.



Figure 10: Instagram post providing a visual look into life at *FSU*, the student experience, and brand tradition.

*FSU*'s social media features far more videos than the website. The university's YouTube channel has a number of videos with footage of campus life, events, athletics, and academic achievements on it yet most of the videos are not embedded on the site.

Videos, like the one below featuring move-in and welcome weekend, bring the student experience alive for users who haven't been to campus yet or can't visit. Especially for admitted students nervous about going to college and making a decision, these types of videos are an important research tool to get them excited and committed to *FSU*. Current students and their families are more likely to engage with video content like this on social media, but it also has value as website content for other user groups.

Videos, like the fall campus scenes video below, are nice, short pieces of content that help to amplify the benefit of the university's setting. The basic beauty of them can appeal to current students and family on social media, but on the website, they can have an additional function. Prospective and admitted students and their families can get a look at the natural environment of *FSU* and decide whether that is a good fit for them and their preferences.

## Examples

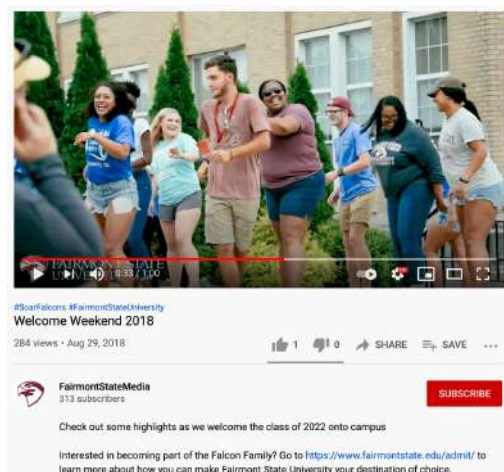


Figure 11: A YouTube video recapping a move in and welcome weekend experience on campus. This a good example of visually portraying the energy and vibrancy of the campus community and college experience.

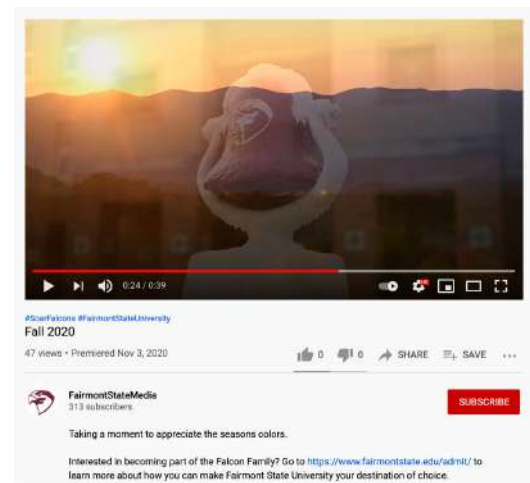


Figure 12: A YouTube video showing fall scenes from the natural environment around campus. This might be better if people were in it but its still helpful to get an idea of the setting of the university.

Facebook and Twitter seem to post a good deal of the same content. A lot of this content is about driving traffic back to the news stories published on the website. Content on these platforms is also heavily focused on informing the university community about events and deadlines. That these types of content are together on social media perhaps shows the need for a central place on the website for timely, active content like this.

For example, the tweet below shares about the campus food bank. This is not only important for current students and their families dealing with food insecurity, but it communicates to prospective and admitted students and their families *FSU*'s values and willingness to support the varied needs of its community.

As well, the Facebook post below intended to persuade current students to live on campus shares a quote from a student about that experience. This testimony and picture could also work on the website to speak to prospective students and their families trying to decide if *FSU* can offer them the college experience they want.

Overall, social media does a much better job of content marketing to all user groups than the website does, even if there are still opportunities to improve the quality and amount of social media content.

## Examples



Figure 13: A Facebook post about applying for housing gives users not just information but a little storytelling and personal connection to the community.



Figure 14: A tweet about the campus food bank helps to reach those who need the service and also show the values of the university in supporting its students with a range of needs.

# CURRENT SEO

## Page Titles

Page titles are small pieces of HTML found on every webpage that are important for users because they determine the name of a page when it's displayed in search engine results. The clearer and more interesting a page title is the more likely a user will click on it.

All pages on the *FSU* site have page titles, but 47% of them are not unique having the same title as at least one other page. Most of them also do not include the name of the university making it unclear to users looking at search engine results who the owner of the site is unless they look at the URL.

Most page titles are not meaningful to users either as they simply use internal navigation labels, such as in the example below. The better page titles consist of the title of a news article. However, these are often too long and subject to being cut off in search engine results. 50% of all titles are over the recommended 60 character limit. The shortest title is 13 characters and the longest is 179 characters.

Overall, there is great opportunity to improve the page titles across the site both in length and in writing.

## Examples

www.fairmontstate.edu › forms ▼

**Forms | Forms**

*Figure 15: Bad example of a page title. "Forms" is a vague name that offers users little information about the page's content and it is on the shorter side for a page title.*

fairmontstate.edu › fsunow › front-page-school-education › students-come-tog ... ▼

**Students come together to set a new record of debris collected ...**

*Figure 16: Another bad example of a page title. Although this title offers more information and meaning to users about the page, it is too long.*

## Meta Descriptions

Meta descriptions are small pieces of HTML found on every webpage that are important for users because they determine the description of a page when it's displayed in search engine results. They provide a summary of a page's contents and should be informative and enticing.

68% of the pages on the *FSU* site are missing meta descriptions. The shortest is 3 characters long and the longest is 1106 characters. Of the pages with descriptions, 87% of them are too long. Most actually skew to over 200 characters making them far longer than the recommended 120-155 character length.

Key landing pages, such as the admissions page and the homepage seen below, are all missing meta descriptions. The only pages on the site with descriptions are news articles pages where an excerpt or summary of the articles is used. This can be helpful and enticing to a user, but most of these descriptions are too long.

Overall, there is great opportunity to improve the meta descriptions for all pages on the site, both in writing and in length.

### Examples

fairmontstate.edu ▼

**Fairmont State University | Fairmont State University**

*Figure 17: A bad example of a meta description. This shows that the search engine result for the homepage, an integral page, is missing a description altogether and provides users no information about the university besides a repetition of its name.*

www.fairmontstate.edu › fsunow › alumni-pride-falcons-give-back-fsu-front-pag ... ▼

**Brickstreet Foundation Gift Creates \$1 Million Scholarship ...**

A \$1 million gift from BrickStreet Foundation to the Fairmont State Foundation, Inc., will create a new scholarship fund for Fairmont State University students.

*Figure 18: One of the few good examples of a meta description for an article page. It is optimized for length and clearly communicating what the page is about. The overall search engine result, though, suffers from a cut-off page title.*



## Header Elements

Header elements allow users to navigate the content of a page more easily and provide information about what content on a page or in a section is about, both to users and search engines. They have a hierarchy of h1 to h6, h1 being the most important and decreasing in importance from there. Each page should only have one h1 but can have unlimited numbers of the other header elements.

All but 111 pages on the *FSU* site have an h1, but 2% (623) of pages break the rules and have 2. 25% of pages also do not have an h2. h1 elements are used appropriately to communicate the topic of the page's content as either the title of an article or the title of a page as used in navigation menus. However, even though the hierarchy of header elements is respected, page construction does not have a clear, consistent visual hierarchy which makes scanning difficult. Header elements are also overused and repetitive in what they communicate or misused for styling.

## Examples

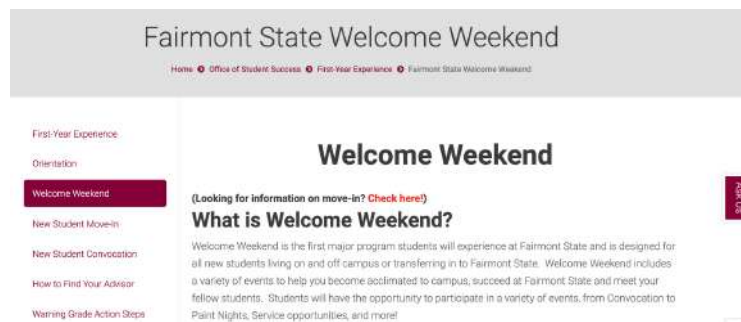


Figure 19: The h1 element on this page is "Fairmont State Welcome Weekend" yet the h2 "Welcome Weekend" repeats the same title essentially and competes for visual attention and dominance.

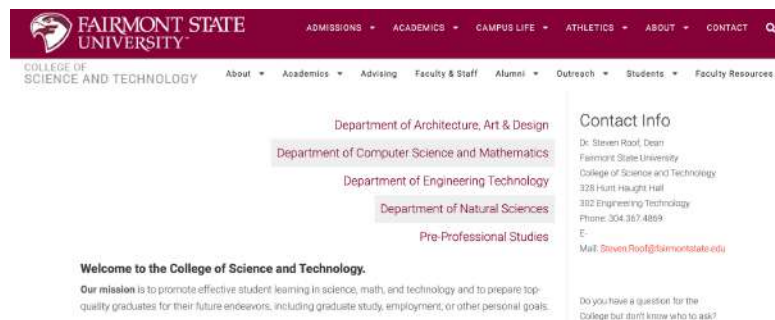


Figure 20: This page is missing not just an h1, but all header elements. "Welcome to the College of Science and Technology" only stands out because it was bolded.

# CURRENT ACCESSIBILITY

## Image Alt Text

Alt text, or alternative text, is information about an image provided for those who cannot access images on a site, either because of a visual disability or technical preference to not load images – such as to preserve bandwidth. These are not necessarily descriptions of the image. The point of them is to communicate in words the equivalent of the information that an image provides users visually.

47% of the 30,000 images on the *FSU* site are missing alt text. Of the images that have alt text, many are wrongly relying on alt text to communicate text edited onto photos. Some images have accurate, helpful and informative alt text, but overall alt text and accessibility of images is a weakness of the site

## Examples



Alt Text: "#WeAreOneFalconFamily  
A message from President Mirta M. Martin"

*Figure 21: A bad example of alt text. Although it accurately communicates what is written on the image, it does not say that President Martin is in the image standing outside on campus. Placing text over images should be done with HTML, not photo editing software as done here because accessibility devices cannot detect it this way. Alt text should not be relied on for this purpose.*



Alt Text: "Two people standing in front of a small plane in a hangar"

*Figure 22: Good example of alt text on an image. This communicates what is happening in the image and the information a user would gain from it visually.*



## Multimedia Alternatives

Ensuring that audio and video are accessible for those who cannot see or hear because of a disability, their environment, or personal preference requires accommodation from a site, including captions, audio transcripts, and audio descriptions.

Of the few videos on the *FSU* site, none offer these accessibility accommodations, even though they are mostly embedded from YouTube which easily allows for the inclusion of these.

## Customizable Text

In order to accommodate disabilities and preferences, users need to be able to adjust the size, color, and font of the text on a site. As well as access the text using text-to-speech technology.

On the *FSU* site, the text is adjustable by size using the zoom in and out functions on a browser. The page layout adjusts accordingly to ensure content remains fully accessible no matter the text size. There is also good color contrast for reading text with black text on white backgrounds and white text on maroon backgrounds. Users, however, cannot change the color or font of the text. Text, though, can be accessed using text-to-speech software.

## Keyboard Access

Not everyone can or likes to navigate sites using a mouse. Some users depend solely on a keyboard to access a site, so its important that everything on a page that can be reached by a mouse can be reached by a keyboard.

The *FSU* site is fully accessible using a keyboard. This includes menus, buttons, video player controls, and input fields. However, users cannot skip the navigation and other header content and must navigate through it with each new page. Users are, though, assisted with a black box outlining an area of the page when they navigate to it with the keyboard, helping with tracking where they are and orienting themselves faster.

## Buttons & Controls

Small buttons and controls are hard to click on and use for those who have visual or physical disabilities. The FSU site does not consistently use buttons for calls to action. Some buttons are the right size to make them easy to interact with, but some – especially hyperlinked text used as calls to action – may be too small to easily click or notice.

### Examples

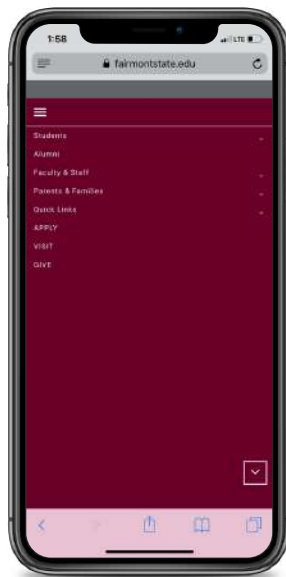


Figure 23: The header menu expanded on mobile offers very small menu labels closely spaced together that are hard for users to tap on and select with their fingers on the touchscreen

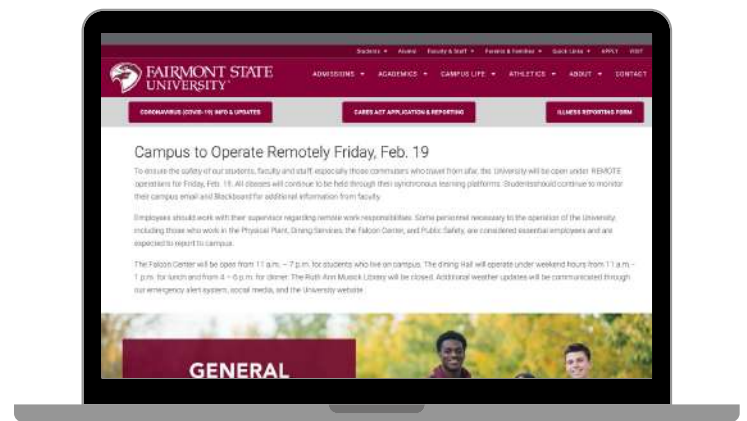


Figure 24: The same header menu is seen at the top of the page on desktop. The menu labels are also small here, but because users will be using a keyboard or mouse these small labels are still easy to select

**Apply Now**  
**Schedule a Visit**

Figure 25: These are important calls to action on the undergraduate admissions page. Although the red color helps them stand out, a maroon button as seen on the homepage would work better for these. Plus, red is not an FSU brand color and is not consistent with the color scheme of the overall site.

## Forms, Labels, & Errors

For forms and input fields on sites to be accessible they should provide clear labeling so all users know what they need to do. Error messages should also help users know what they did wrong and need to correct.

Input fields on the *FSU* site are properly labeled with what information should be in them, but asterisks or other indicators of required fields are not present. General error messages are provided when incorrect information is entered into fields or required information is missing, such as the messages the email sign-up form offers in the examples below. These, though, do not explain to users exactly what they need to do in order to correct the problem, such as phone numbers needing numerals or email addresses needing the @ symbol.

### Examples

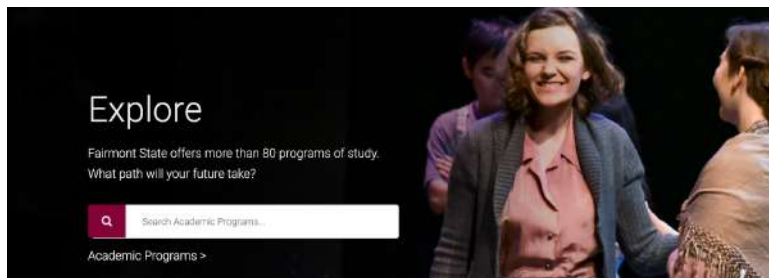


Figure 26: An example of a input field clearly labeled with what type of information users should enter.



Figure 27: An error message on the email form when required information is missing. Missing required fields are highlighted in red, but this is not accessible for people with certain visual disabilities, such as color blindness.



Figure 28: A general error message on the email form when required information is not formatted properly. No further directions are given to help users correct the mistake.

# CURRENT ARCHITECTURE

## Responsive Design

The *FSU* site design adjusts to all screen sizes. Most text is appropriately sized for each, but because text is being placed over photos via photo editing, this often important text does not adjust well to mobile as seen below. Other photos and videos do adjust size appropriately. All menus and all necessary navigation elements are available on mobile, but the use of multiple hamburger menus for header, global, and local navigation can be overwhelming and confusing to users. Loading speed is very slow on many pages on desktop and this extends to mobile.

Overall, a better responsive design is needed to aid users in navigation, more optimally display content and increase load speed.

## Examples



Figure 29: An example of the site on a mobile device.

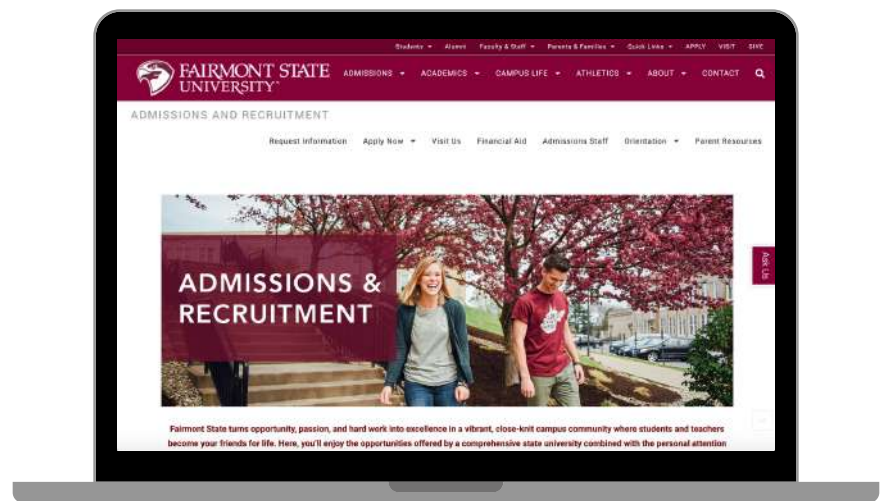


Figure 30: An example of the site on a desktop device.

## Navigation

Navigation on the site has many tiers. The header and global menus are the primary means of navigation and are always present at the top of the page. The header menu is smaller and features links to key information, calls to action, and categories built for specific audiences – students, parents, alumni.

When a page is entered from the global menu its local navigation is displayed as a third horizontal top menu on desktop or hamburger menu on mobile. This navigation is duplicated as a side menu on some pages on desktop and stacked on top of all page content on mobile as displayed on the nursing school page on the next page's example.

Most menus are not highly cluttered and on average have only 5–8 categories with a few options per category. The global menu is the exception, the dropdown submenus under each of its categories are large but well organized and logical.

All levels of navigation have clear and concise labeling that would make sense for most users, although some labels could be refined. Breadcrumb menus are also available on pages throughout the site to help users easily know where they are.

As previously mentioned, page hierarchy is messy and inconsistent across pages making it difficult to scan and easily locate key information. There is an inconsistent content layout across the site which makes users have to reorient themselves often when changing pages.

Although some redesigning of the site information architecture could be beneficial, overall the site's content is generally well organized categorically and menu labeling is clear.

The user interface design of navigation is what most gets in the way. The continual layering of top menus confuses users about which menu to use for what. These multiple layers of navigation are necessary for the complexity of content the site must hold, but users need a consistent use of different styles of menus for different levels of navigation to cut the confusion and unclutter the top of the screen. For example, a top dropdown menu for local navigation and a hamburger menu for global navigation on mobile instead of 2 hamburger menus.

## Examples



Figure 31: The School of Nursing main page on mobile has 3 different hamburger menus. The section's local navigation has also been duplicated as a hyperlinked list at the top of the page content.

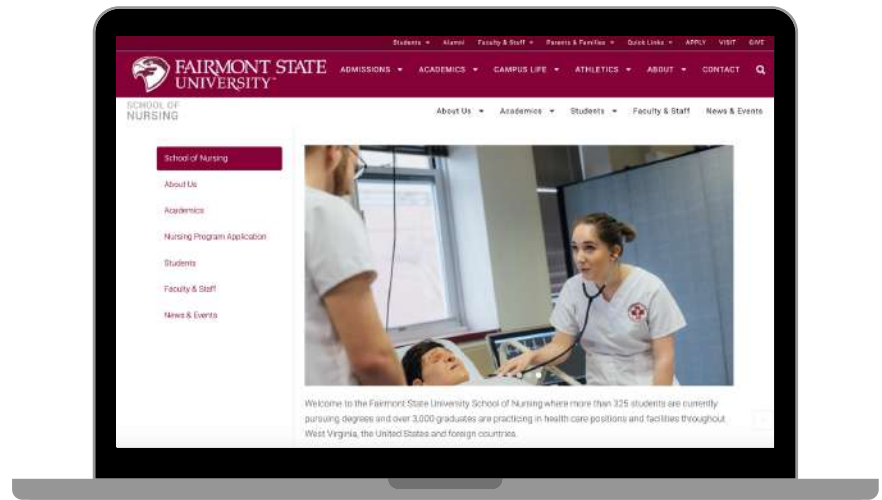


Figure 32: The School of Nursing main page on desktop where has 3 layers of top menus and the section's local navigation has been duplicated in a side menu. This side navigation style is not the default but shows up randomly on some pages such as this.

## Search

The site does not have its own internal site search function. Searching the site provides search results in Google. This causes users to leave the site, which is not preferable because they can easily not return to the site if they cannot find what they want in the results. Depending on Google also does not allow for designing search results according to what the university knows users most need and seek out. Creating a search function that provides results inside the site should be a priority.

# CURRENT WRITING

## Style & Voice

The writing on the *FSU* site is inconsistent in style and voice. On some pages, such as admissions pages, it is very approachable and conversational using common phrasing like "You bet!" while on others, such as program pages, it is academic and intimidating using jargon like "social frameworks of human behaviors."

The same is true of how *FSU* refers to itself on different pages. On some, it uses first-person pronouns (our, we) that elicit a close, helpful relationship with the institution. On other pages, though, it refers to itself in the third person and has a tone that feels more distant or presentational to the reader.

This inconsistency can be jarring to users and potentially drive them away, especially those who are less comfortable with the application process or not from a background where college attendance is common. It also communicates that the institution may not know who it is because it cannot speak with one voice. This could be interpreted as a lack of coordination or agreement between parts of the whole institution which could worry some students or families about the university's ability to provide a supportive, seamless experience and valuable education.

## Audience

Most site content is speaking directly to students (prospective, admitted, and current). Just as the style and voice of the writing fluctuate so does the reading level. Some writing is at a high school level, but some can dip into college level.

Even though this is a website for a university, it's important to keep in mind the educational background of the site's core audience, especially because *FSU* serves such a high percentage of first-generation students. Keeping writing simple, clear, and to the point is not dumbing things down, but being supportive of the needs of students and their families and making a college education more accessible for them.



# CONTENT ALIGNMENT & STRATEGY

## Findings

Examination of website and social media content found that it is moderately aligned with the business goals outlined in this report, but there is significant room for improvement. Website content is informationally correct but lacks organization, visual appeal, and emotional storytelling. While the information that different user groups of students and families need is present on the site, its ability to be successful is seriously hampered by poor page design and lack of scannability.

This type of content should be fulfilling the objectives of connecting prospective students to degree programs of most interest, communicating the application and financial aid process, and helping current students and their families navigate the sometimes overwhelming experience of going to college – paying bills, choosing classes, signing up for housing – but its questionable whether it is capable of doing any of this well in its current state.

Social media content, although less heavily informational, is more successful in aligning with the needs of users to support business goals. It excels at sharing about the student experience and community, and connecting students with the resources they need to stay engaged and succeed. It should be looked at as a reference for what the current site's content, design, and tone are missing. Social media content may be able to be repurposed for the site, but there will still need to be an investment in content creation.

Content on the website needs a significant overhaul. Factual information can be kept if still relevant but it needs to be rewritten and edited for focus, clarity, and a consistent brand voice. There is also a great need to add high-quality photos, videos, and other visual or interactive content to the site to create a more engaging user experience that shows instead of just tells about *FSU*. Overall, current site content is more a hurdle than a help for increasing applications, enrollment, and retention.

## Recommendations

Based on the content analysis the following is recommended to better align the *FSU* website content with business goals.

- **Focus more on storytelling and the people of *FSU***

This can take really any form – written articles, quotes, photos, videos, podcasts. Storytelling is one of the best ways to communicate. It inspires and energizes. People are an important part of telling a university brand's story because what is a university if not its people and their ideas, values, and experiences? A practical, value-based appeal is important, but people connect with people. This asset should be leveraged digitally.

- **Show, don't tell**

On one hand, this speaks to the inclusion of more videos and photos on the site, but, on the other, it's about demonstrating the value of *FSU*. Don't just say students work in simulation labs, show photos of them doing it. Don't just write that alumni work as teachers, share the story of one applying what they learned at *FSU*. Don't just provide a checklist for what needs to be done for admissions, have a video series with an admission officer answering the 10 most common questions or correcting the 10 most common mistakes.

- **Leverage social media and quality user-generated content**

It's important to add some authenticity into the mix of the site's content. Not only are people now more suspicious of marketing content, but this also aligns with *FSU's* brand goal of being approachable. Just because going to college is a serious academic commitment does not mean a university has to be serious all the time. In fact, the opposite can be very helpful for first-generation students and their families to feel comfortable and included. Just remember authentic does not mean low quality or unorganized.

- **Help users find and focus on the content they need and want quickly**

This recommendation relates to both content creation and page design. If users are required to dig for information the chance increases that they will give up or assume the information is not available. This means their ability or commitment to their goals – which include applying, enrolling, or staying in school – could be negatively impacted. Content should be written and organized with action bias. This does not mean it must be strictly utilitarian, only that users should be able to easily skip over content they deem to be irrelevant to their intended goal.

## Additional Recommendations Based on Findings

- Add helpful, informative alt text to all images
- Do not edit text onto images in order to avoid accessibility problems
- Improve meta descriptions for all pages, both in writing and in length
- Improve page titles across the site, both in writing and in length
- Add an h1 element to all pages
- Use header elements correctly, only for header text not to bold text
- Create a clear, consistent visual hierarchy for content on pages
- Offer captions, audio transcripts, and audio descriptions of videos
- Offer the ability for users to change the color or font of the site's text
- Offer users the ability to skip navigation and other header content when using a keyboard
- Use easy-to-click buttons for important calls to action
- Use asterisks or other indicators to indicate required fields
- Offer better error messages that tell users exactly what they need to do in order to correct a problem
- Develop a better responsive design to improve the mobile experience
- Create consistent content layout across the site so users don't have to reorient themselves often when changing pages
- Redesign information architecture and consider label changes
- Use different styles of menus for different levels of navigation to cut the confusion and unclutter the top of the screen
- Offer internal site search function
- Write with a consistent style and voice
- Avoid overly academic language, focus on high school reading level
- Optimize photos for the web, aiming for file sizes under 1 MB in order to increase page loading speed
- Do not use PDFs as the only means of communicating information because these are not accessible for all users

## Core Strategy Statement

A core strategy statement is a memorable guiding light for the overall mission of a content strategy. It quickly explains what business goal the strategy is meant to assist with, what users the content is meant for, what these users need from the content, and what kind of content needs to be offered. In aligning business goals with user needs, it helps in deciding what content needs to be provided to what users at what time and for what reasons in order to be successful. The following is the core strategy statement for *FSU*'s proposed website content strategy:

**To increase enrollment we will provide informative, inspiring, and approachable content that helps students and their families feel certain about choosing *FSU* and supported from their first visit through commencement and beyond.**

## Messaging Framework

A messaging framework explains what the desired user first reaction to content is and what content should strive to prove to users about a business. If potential content does not seem capable of achieving the reactions outlined in the framework then it is unlikely to support the content strategy and should not be used. For *FSU*'s proposed website content strategy the following framework was developed:

- **First Impression:** This seems like the right place for me.
- **Value Statement:** I feel empowered because I can find and understand information that helps me take action.
- **Proof:** They get what someone like me needs in order to successfully pursue a degree.

# COMPETITIVE ANALYSIS

The following competitive analysis examines 3 fellow West Virginia universities to identify opportunities for *FSU* site content and design.

	West Virginia University	Marshall University	Davis & Elkins College
Global Navigation Menu Categories	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Academics</li> <li>• Admissions and Aid</li> <li>• Life at WVU</li> <li>• Info For</li> <li>• Research and Innovation</li> <li>• Community</li> <li>• International</li> <li>• About WVU</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meet Marshall</li> <li>• Admissions</li> <li>• Academics</li> <li>• Marshall Life</li> <li>• Athletics</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• About</li> <li>• Admissions</li> <li>• Academics</li> <li>• Student Life</li> <li>• Athletics</li> <li>• Alumni</li> <li>• Give</li> <li>• My D&amp;E Portal</li> </ul>
News & Events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student &amp; faculty profiles section &amp; WVU Today site</li> <li>• Articles have category tags</li> <li>• Upcoming events on homepage &amp; other pages</li> <li>• Distributed across site</li> <li>• Link on homepage</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Infinite list of news articles available in news section</li> <li>• Link to university magazine and feed of upcoming events on news page</li> <li>• Distributed across site</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Blogs with advice for prospective students</li> <li>• News &amp; blog integrated together</li> <li>• Articles have category tags</li> <li>• Link in footer</li> </ul>
Statistics/Rankings	✓	✓	✓
Student Quotes			✓

Table 2: A competitive analysis of website content of 3 other West Virginia higher education institutions.

	West Virginia University	Marshall University	Davis & Elkins College
Program Discoverability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "Explore Our Majors" homepage button</li> <li>• Program listings page with search field and hyperlinks</li> <li>• Majors, Minors, Certificates pages for undergraduate &amp; graduate levels containing tiles for each program with descriptions and links to info</li> <li>• Similar or related program section on program pages</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "What do you want to study?" search field on homepage and Academics page</li> <li>• Undergraduate and graduate degree pages with lists of degrees, their concentrations, and links to program pages</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "What path will you take?" interactive flip cards with subject areas and link to Academics page</li> <li>• Hyperlinked Majors A-Z listing page</li> </ul>
Audience Self-Identification Options	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parents &amp; Families</li> <li>• Visitors</li> <li>• Current Students</li> <li>• Faculty &amp; Staff</li> <li>• Employers &amp; Business Leaders</li> <li>• Policymakers</li> <li>• Alumni</li> <li>• Donors</li> <li>• Media</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Future Students</li> <li>• Current Students</li> <li>• Parents &amp; Families</li> <li>• Faculty &amp; Staff</li> <li>• Alumni &amp; Friends</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Current Students</li> <li>• Faculty &amp; Staff</li> <li>• Parents &amp; Families</li> <li>• Alumni &amp; Friends</li> </ul>
Custom Pages for User Groups	✓	✓	✓
Next steps to take action outlined	✓	✓	✓

Table 2 cont: A competitive analysis of website content of 3 other West Virginia higher education institutions.

## Noteworthy Content

During the competitive analysis, the following content and site designs stood out as potentially relevant to the business goals outlined in this report.

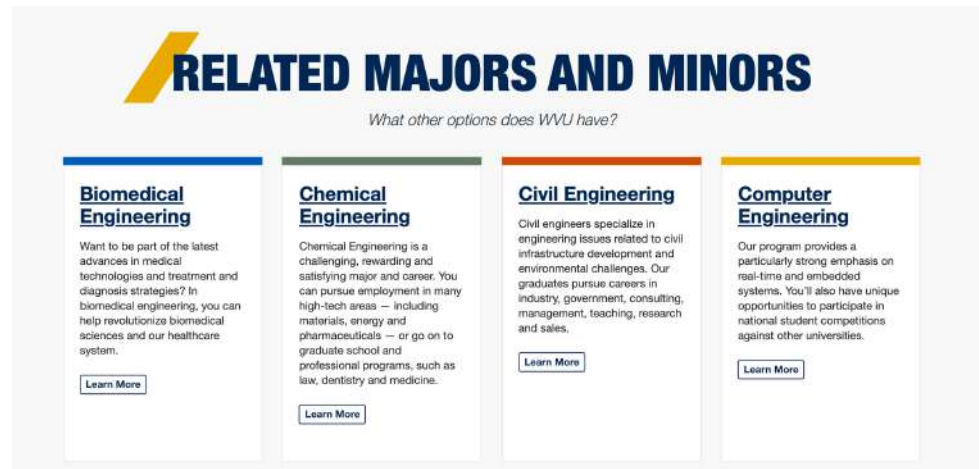


Figure 33: Guidance on related majors and minors on a West Virginia University program page provides academic counseling to prospective students, and possibly even admitted and current ones as well.



Figure 34: Popular courses with students in a major on a West Virginia University program page helps prospective and admitted students get a peek into what they might take and possibly even provides some additional guidance to current students about what courses to choose.



## Possible Careers

Wondering what you can do with a degree from WVU's Aerospace Engineering major? Check out these ideas from [WVU Career Services](#) and the [Occupational Information Network \(O\\*NET\)](#). A median salary is the midpoint of what people typically earn—half of those surveyed earned above the median salary, and half earned below.

Bright Outlook
 Green Occupation
 Requires a Graduate Degree

### Aerospace Engineers

**\$109,650**  
MEDIAN SALARY

Perform engineering duties in designing, constructing, and testing aircraft, missiles, and spacecraft. May conduct basic and applied research to evaluate adaptability of materials and equipment to aircraft design and manufacture. May recommend improvements in testing equipment and techniques. Possible job titles for this career include: Aerospace Engineer.

[Learn More](#)

### Materials Engineers

**\$93,310**  
MEDIAN SALARY

Evaluate materials and develop machinery and processes to manufacture materials for use in products that must meet specialized design and performance specifications. Develop new uses for known materials. Includes those engineers working with composite materials or specializing in one type of material, such as graphite, metal and metal alloys, ceramics and glass, plastics and polymers, and naturally occurring materials. Includes metallurgists and metallurgical engineers, ceramic engineers, and welding engineers. Possible job titles for this career include: Materials Engineer.

[Learn More](#)

Figure 35: Guidance on possible career outcomes and salaries for a major on a West Virginia University program page. This is helpful for prospective students who may know what they want to be but not how to get there, or for those looking for evidence to justify their choice.

## Tuition and Fees

Estimated rates for the 2020-21 academic year. Rates are subject to change. Anyone that is not a current West Virginia resident will be charged non-resident rates. That includes international students.

West Virginia Resident		Non-Resident		International	
Per Credit	\$435	Per Credit	\$1,144	Per Credit	\$1,144
Per Semester	\$5,220	Per Semester	\$13,728	Per Semester	\$14,028
Fall and Spring Semesters	\$10,440	Fall and Spring Semesters	\$27,456	Fall and Spring Semesters	\$28,056

**Scholarship Chart**  
 Estimate your eligibility for merit scholarships at WVU Morgantown.  
[Visit the Scholarship Chart](#)

**Net Price Calculator**  
 Estimate your cost of attendance and eligibility for financial aid and scholarships at any WVU System campus.  
[Visit the Net Price Calculator](#)

Figure 36: Guidance on tuition cost is conveniently included on a West Virginia University program page. This creates one-stop shopping for prospective and admitted students who often will focus on program pages but still wonder about cost.

## Next Steps

Interested in this major? Here are some suggested next steps:



Figure 37: Buttons with options for next steps for prospective students help encourage action on a West Virginia University program page.



Figure 38: A section on the Marshall University homepage outlines what prospective students and their families should do next after visiting the site.




 <p><b>Freshman Student</b></p> <p>A freshman student is a student who has not enrolled in any college or university course following high school graduation and intends to seek an undergraduate degree.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ To apply for admission to Marshall, get started with your <a href="#">Admission Checklist</a>.</li> <li>➤ If you've been accepted, review the <a href="#">Admitted Student Checklist</a>.</li> </ul>	 <p><b>Transfer Student</b></p> <p>A transfer student is a student who wishes to pursue a degree from Marshall University but who has previously enrolled at another college or university.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ To apply for admission to Marshall, get started with your <a href="#">Admission Checklist</a>.</li> <li>➤ If you've been accepted, review the <a href="#">Admitted Student Checklist</a>.</li> </ul>	 <p><b>Transient Student</b></p> <p>A transient student is as student who is pursuing a degree at another college or university but would like to take classes at Marshall University. A transient student may attend Marshall University for no more than two consecutive semesters.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ To apply for admission to Marshall, get started with your <a href="#">Admission Checklist</a>.</li> <li>➤ If you've been accepted, review the <a href="#">Admitted Student Checklist</a>.</li> </ul>
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Figure 39: This helpful menu describing the types of students who apply to Marshall University helps prospective students clarify that they're on the right application path for their situation.

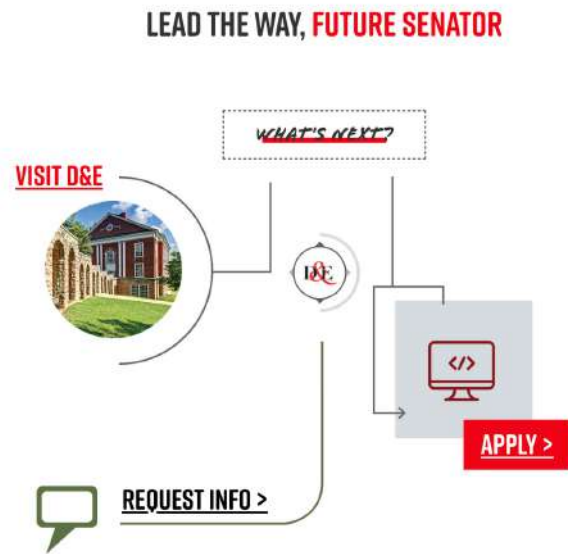


Figure 40: An interactive infographic shows the paths prospective students and their families can take after visiting the Davis & Elkins College site.

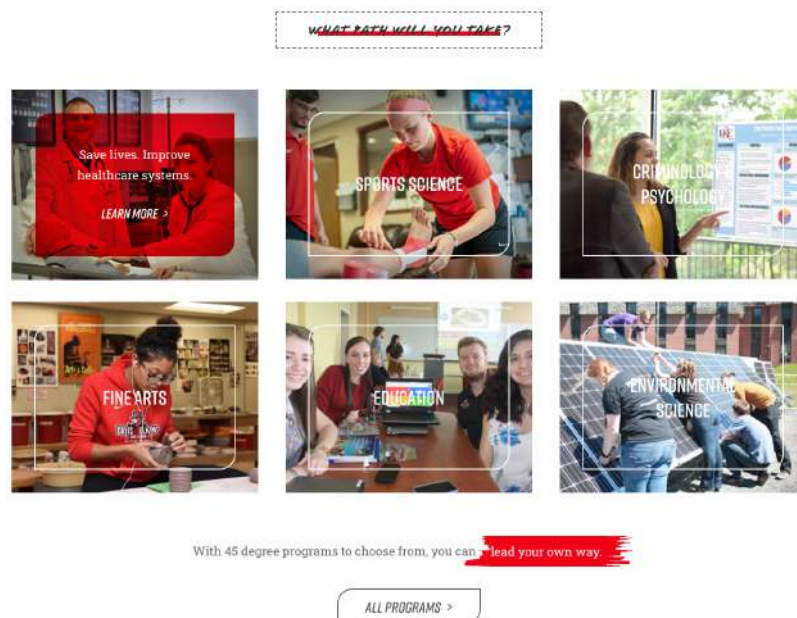


Figure 41: These interactive flip cards help prospective students narrow down the area of study they might be interested in. This is a welcome signal to prospective students who are unsure of their major that this school is ok with that and willing to work with them to find what's right.

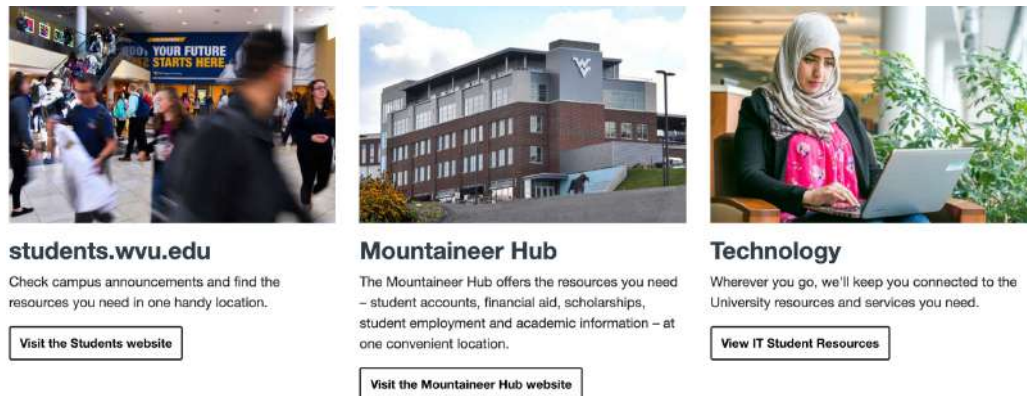


Figure 42: A visual, easy-to-scan menu on the current student landing page for West Virginia University clearly explains where students need to go for what resources and information.



Figure 43: Interactive flip cards create a shortcut menu at the top of the Davis & Elkins' financial aid page guiding prospective, admitted, and current students and their families to the most relevant tools for them to use to meet common goals related to financial aid.



Figure 44: The Student Life section on the West Virginia University site connects current students with upcoming campus community events. This content is also valuable for prospective and admitted students and their families interested in a real view of the social opportunities the community provides.



## FEATURED BLOG



### 10 REASONS TO CHOOSE A COLLEGE WITH STRONG STUDENT LEADERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

From the excitement about making new friends to anxiety about the academic challenge, there's a lot to think about when preparing for college. Here's one to add to the list: student leadership. Why? Because among those immediate concerns every new student has, they... [Read Full Story](#)


## LATEST BLOGS



### NURSING SCHOOLS: HOW TO NARROW IT DOWN AND GET IN

For those who want to help people, nursing is a wonderful profession to get into. Before you can join the ranks of these compassionate health workers, you need to look at nursing schools. It's a good idea to take steps to ensure you go all the way. You should... [Read Full Story](#)

Figure 45: The Davis & Elkins College blog offers counseling advice to prospective students and their families. This not only is helpful content but offering it could make members of these user groups see this school as more caring than other schools because it wants to assist students with making good decisions rather than just convince them to go to this particular school.



ACADEMICS [Student Profiles](#) | [Faculty Profiles](#)

## PURSUE EVERY PASSION

Pareera Uqailly

Like many college freshmen, Pareera was unsure of her career path, but she knew one thing was for certain: she loved WVU. After switching to business, she found her passion for data analytics and decided on double majoring in [Accounting and Management Information Systems](#).

[Q&A With Pareera](#)

**ALSO SEE:**

- [John Chambers College of Business and Economics](#)
- [Delta Sigma Pi](#)
- [Muslim Students Association](#)
- [Pakistani Students' Association](#)

Figure 46: West Virginia University uses tags on student and faculty profiles to cross-promote and connect users to various aspects of the WVU experience, including programs, schools, and student organizations. This is a valuable discovery tool for both prospective and current members of the community.

# CONTENT DESIGN

Based on observations of what digital content *FSU* currently has and the university's business goals for the site, the following assets were developed to outline a content design that supports this report's recommendations for a new content strategy.

- **Prioritization Table**

This table helps to determine a site's content and its importance to both users and the business. In the table "focus" refers to content the site should focus on because it's important to both parties, "drive" refers to content that users were not originally looking for but that can drive them to do things beneficial to the business, and "guide" refers to content users need to guide them forward but that isn't beneficial to the business.

- **Content Model**

The content model helps to determine the strategic presentation of pieces of content on a site's pages. This table links content priorities to business goals identified in the content alignment and identifies core pages for supporting these goals. Each page is then assigned a list of content that needs to be on it in order to succeed at supporting the goal.

- **Site Map**

Site maps determine how a site's content will be organized and labeled. The information architecture developed in this design process helps users to easily navigate the site and quickly find what they are looking for.

- **Wireframes**

Wireframes help to show a basic design for content presentation on a page. Site maps show the layout of the whole site, while wireframes show the more detailed layout of a single page. Each of the low fidelity wireframes in this report represents a core page identified in the content model.

## Prioritization Table

User Scenario	Segment	Focus	Drive	Guide
I'm looking at colleges and I want to know if <i>FSU</i> has a program I want to study.	Prospective Students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Program description</li> <li>Courses</li> <li>Admission requirements</li> <li>Cost &amp; Aid</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Faculty &amp; staff</li> <li>Rankings</li> <li>Statistics</li> <li>Accreditations</li> <li>Facilities</li> <li>Student outcomes</li> <li>Similar programs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Careers &amp; salaries</li> <li>Related student organizations</li> </ul>
I've found a program I like and want to know how to apply.	Prospective Students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Deadline and key dates</li> <li>Requirements</li> <li>Application link</li> <li>Aid application</li> <li>Admissions contact info</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Campus visit options</li> <li>Virtual tour</li> <li>Email sign up</li> <li>Information sessions</li> <li>Social media links</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Acceptance rate</li> <li>Accepted student demographics (first-generation, in-state, out-of-state, etc.)</li> </ul>
I want to know how much it will cost to attend <i>FSU</i> .	Prospective Students and Families  Admitted Students and Families	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tuition &amp; fees</li> <li>FAFSA &amp; aid application</li> <li>Scholarships</li> <li>Price calculator</li> <li>Financial Aid contact info</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Work study &amp; campus jobs for students</li> <li>Payment plans</li> <li>Budgeting advice</li> <li>Comparisons to other institutions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Loan options &amp; explanation</li> <li>Average aid awarded</li> <li>Percentage of students receiving aid</li> </ul>
I've been accepted to <i>FSU</i> and am trying to decide if living there will be right for me.	Admitted Students and Families	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Dorm options</li> <li>Dorm room photos, videos, floor plans</li> <li>Meal plans</li> <li>Cost</li> <li>Deadline</li> <li>Accessibility</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Amenities</li> <li>Safety and security</li> <li>Res Life staff</li> <li>Special housing (first year, interest groups, etc.)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Furniture provided</li> <li>Items to bring</li> <li>Roommate assignments</li> <li>Withdrawals and refunds</li> </ul>
I go to <i>FSU</i> and I want to know what's happening in the university community.	Current Students and Families	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>University events</li> <li>University announcements</li> <li>Campus calendar</li> <li>Photos and videos of campus events</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>University news (new faculty, donations, new programs, etc.)</li> <li>Alumni and student success stories</li> <li>Social media links</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Student organizations</li> <li>Student-led events</li> <li>Student media</li> <li>User-generated content from the <i>FSU</i> community</li> </ul>

Table 3: Prioritization table for content on the *FSU* website



## Content Model

Goal	Core List	Core Page	Core Page Content
Increase the number of students who apply to <i>FSU</i> .	Program Information	A Program Page	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Header photo</li> <li>• Description</li> <li>• Career options</li> <li>• Program statistics</li> <li>• Student story</li> <li>• Course plan</li> <li>• Faculty &amp; staff</li> <li>• Apply &amp; Info buttons</li> <li>• Similar programs</li> </ul>
Increase the number of students who apply to <i>FSU</i> .	Admissions Information	Admissions Page	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Header photo</li> <li>• Application button</li> <li>• Deadlines</li> <li>• Decision timeline</li> <li>• Requirements list</li> <li>• Financial Aid link</li> <li>• Contact info</li> <li>• Visit options</li> </ul>
<p>Increase the number of students who apply to <i>FSU</i>.</p> <p>Increase the percentage of admitted students who enroll.</p>	Financial Aid Information	Financial Aid Page	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Header photo</li> <li>• Tuition &amp; Fees chart</li> <li>• <i>FSU</i> aid statistics</li> <li>• Price calculator link</li> <li>• Types of aid list</li> <li>• Scholarship finder link</li> <li>• Aid forms link</li> <li>• Eligibility info</li> <li>• Contact info</li> </ul>
Increase the percentage of admitted students who enroll.	On-Campus Housing Information	A Residence Hall Page	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Header photo</li> <li>• Building description</li> <li>• Photo gallery</li> <li>• Video tour</li> <li>• Amenities list</li> <li>• Furniture list</li> <li>• Packing list</li> <li>• Cost information</li> <li>• Application link</li> </ul>
Improve retention of current students.	University & Campus Event Information	An Event Page	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Header image</li> <li>• Event Name</li> <li>• Date &amp; time</li> <li>• Location</li> <li>• Description &amp; host</li> <li>• Registration button</li> <li>• Similar events</li> </ul>

Table 4: Content model of core pages and their content for the *FSU* website

## Site Map

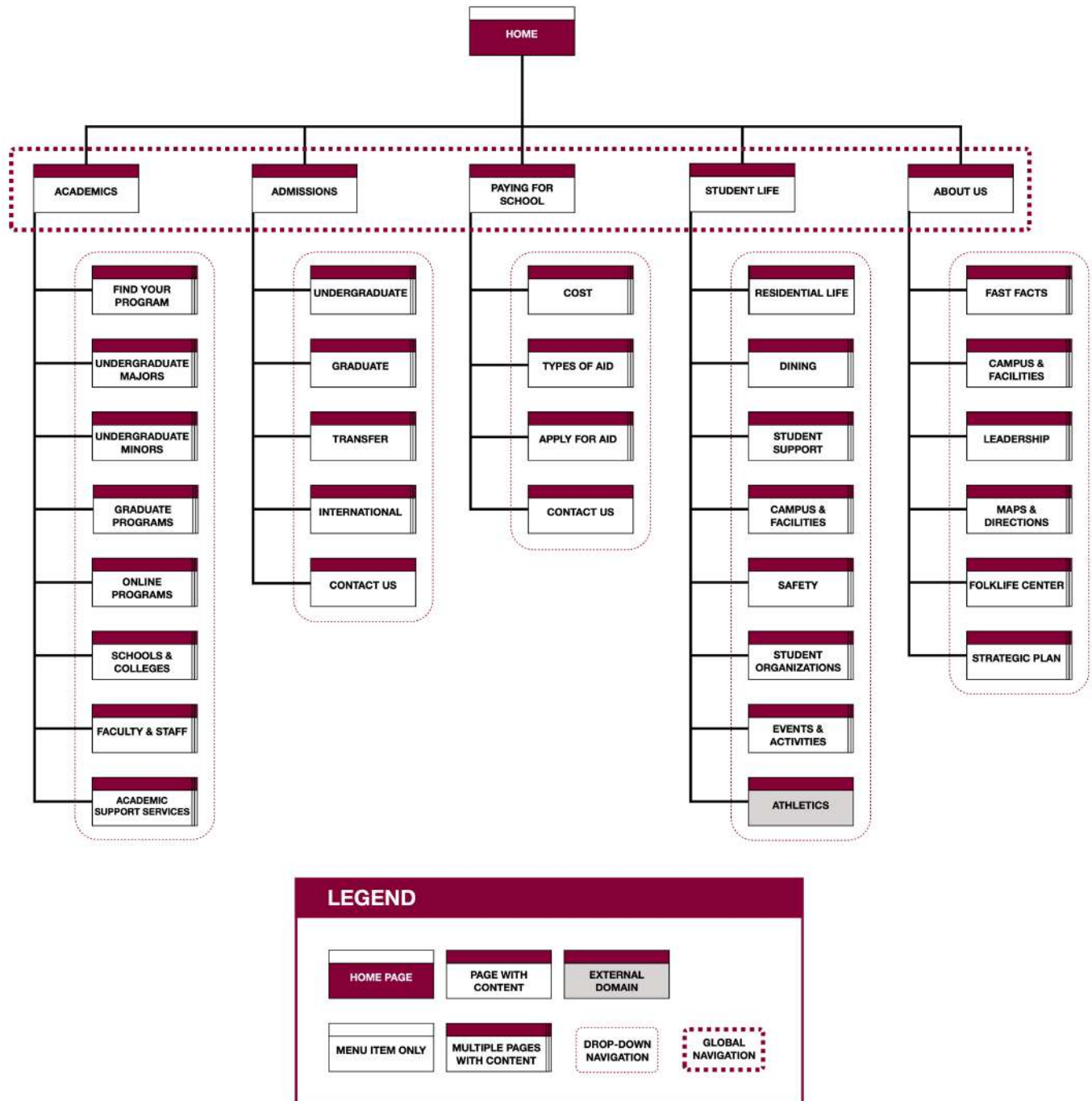


Chart 1: Proposed global navigation for the redesigned FSU website

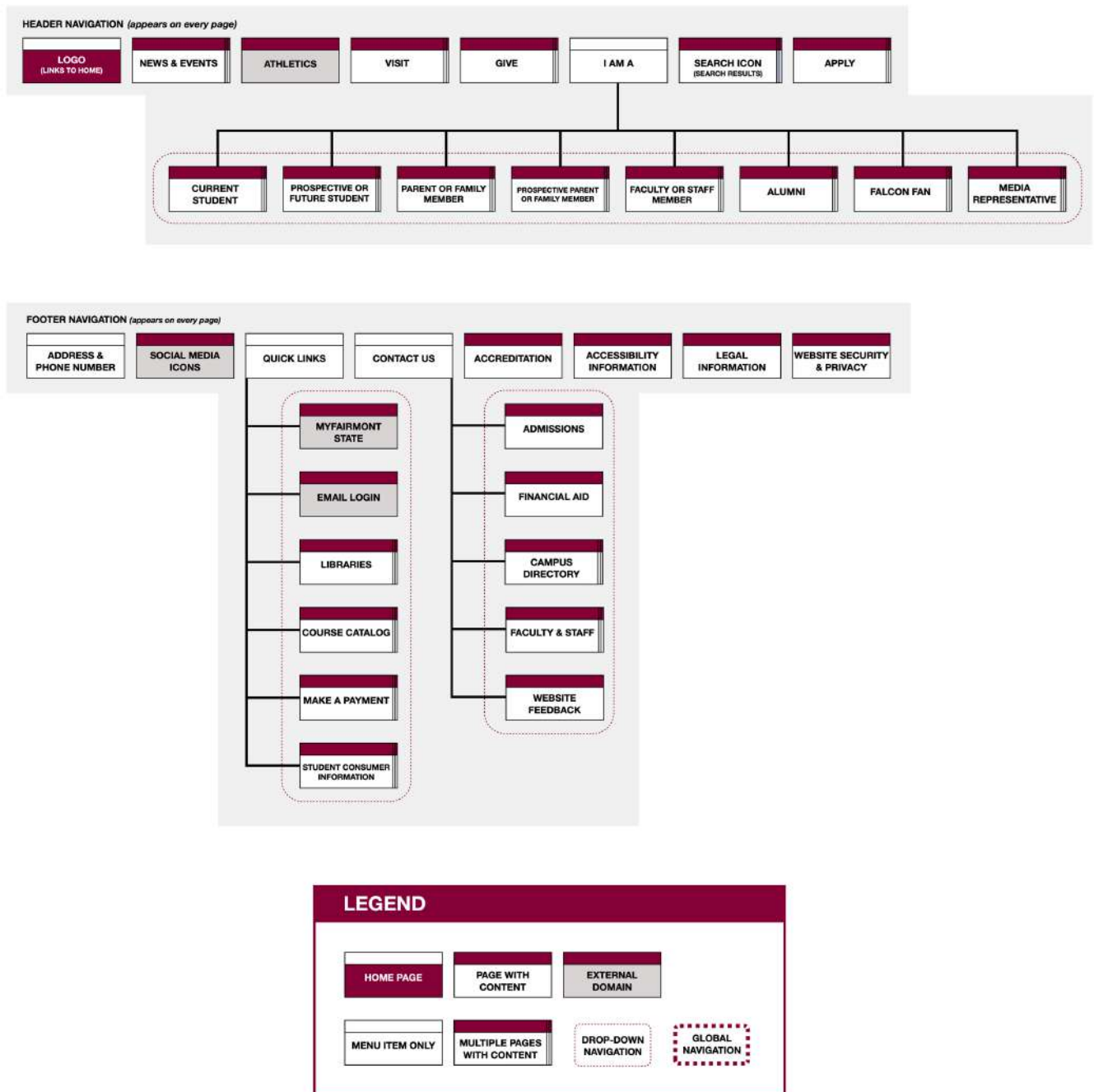
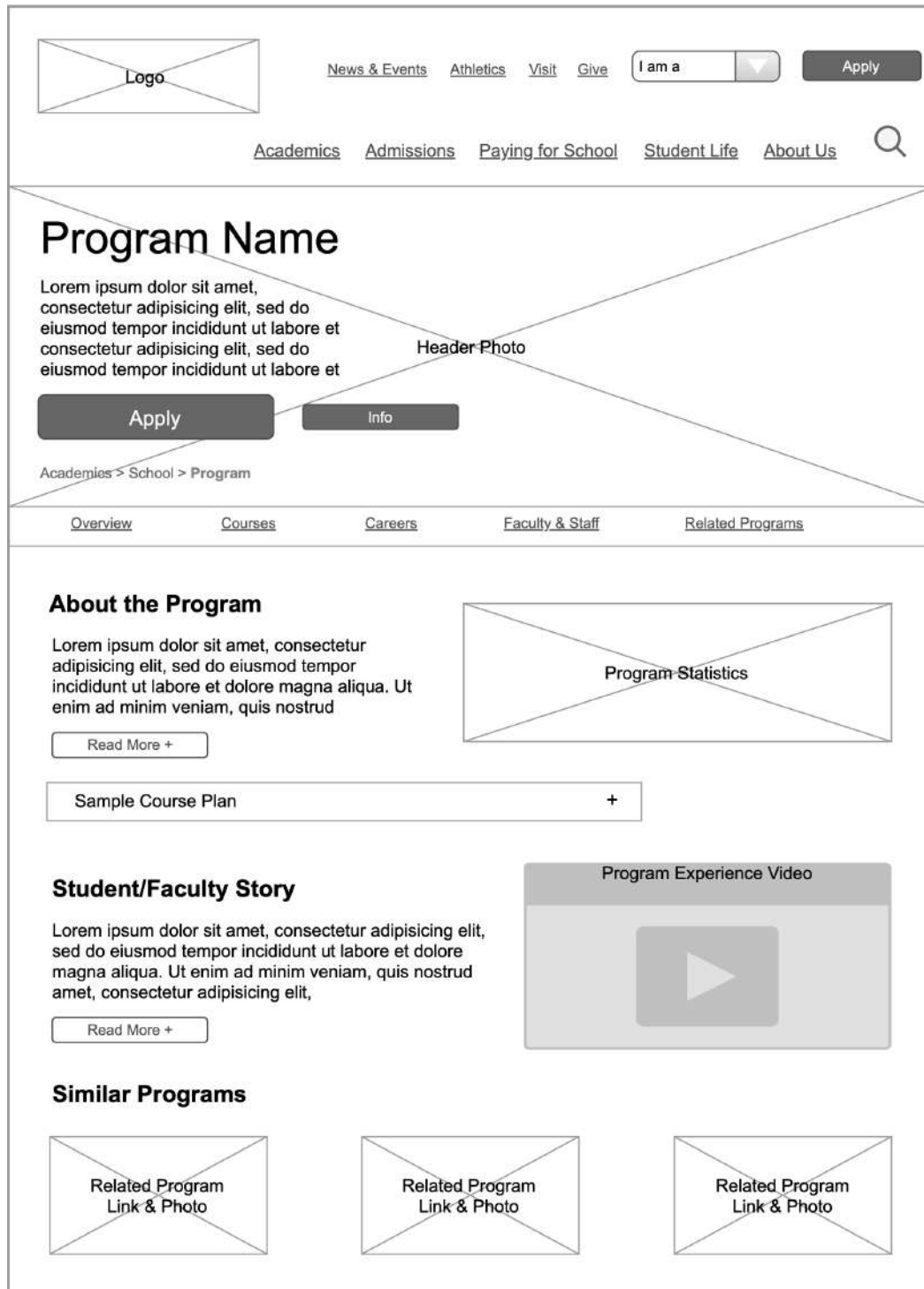


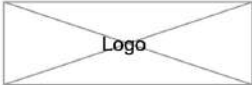
Chart 2: Proposed header and footer navigation for the redesigned FSU website

## Wireframes


### Program Page Wireframe




## Admissions Page Wireframe



[News & Events](#) [Athletics](#) [Visit](#) [Give](#)

I am a 

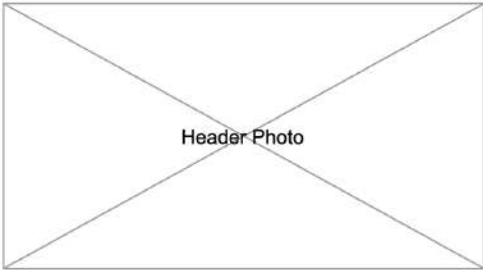
Apply

[Academics](#) [Admissions](#) [Paying for School](#) [Student Life](#) [About Us](#) 

# Undergraduate Admissions

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Apply



Header Photo

Live Chat

[Live chat schedule and details](#)

[Admissions > Undergraduate](#)


[Requirements](#) [Visit](#) [Financial Aid](#) [Contact Us](#) [Meet Your Counselor](#)

### Admission Requirements

First-Year Student	+
Transfer Student	+
International Student	+


### Deadlines & Key Dates

Chart of Admissions Calendar



### Visit Us

Virtual Tour Video



## Financial Aid Page Wireframe

Logo

[News & Events](#) [Athletics](#) [Visit](#) [Give](#)

I am a

Apply

[Academics](#) [Admissions](#) [Paying for School](#) [Student Life](#) [About Us](#)

## Paying for School

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Apply for Aid

Price Calculator

Header Photo

Statistic on FSU Aid Awarded

[Eligibility](#) [First-Year Students](#) [Returning Students](#) [Find Scholarships](#) [Contact Us](#)

### Cost of Attendance

Undergraduate

Graduate

In-State

Out-of-State

Metro

Header 1	Header 2	Header 1	Header 2
row 1, cell 1	row 1, cell 2	row 1, cell 1	row 1, cell 2
row 2, cell 1	row 2, cell 2	row 2, cell 1	row 2, cell 2

### Types of Aid

Grants	+
Scholarships	+
Work Study	+

### Eligibility

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Read More +

### FAFSA Deadline

Month, Day

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Complete FAFSA

Financial Aid Timeline

### Questions?

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Contact Us



## Residence Hall Page Wireframe

Logo

[News & Events](#) [Athletics](#) [Visit](#) [Give](#)

I am a

Apply

[Academics](#) [Admissions](#) [Paying for School](#) [Student Life](#) [About Us](#)

# Housing Option #1

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Student Life > Housing > Housing Option #1

Header Photo

Housing Application

First-year Deadline: month, day  
Returning Deadline: month, day

[Resident Resources](#) [Find A Roommate](#) [Residential Life Staff](#) [Building Activities](#) [Similar Housing Options](#)

## Look Inside

Photo Gallery

## Living On Campus

Dining Options	+
Student Services & Support	+
Amenities	+

## Take A Room Tour

Video

## Building & Room Features

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Packing List

## Housing Fee

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Learn More

## Event Page Wireframe

Logo

[News & Events](#) [Athletics](#) [Visit](#) [Give](#)

[Academics](#) [Admissions](#) [Paying for School](#) [Student Life](#) [About Us](#)

# Event Name

**Date, Time**  
**Hosted By:** [Organization Name](#)  
[Location](#)

 [Add to Calendar](#)

Header Photo

News & Events > Calendar > Event Name

## About the Event

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**Category:** [One](#), [Two](#), [Three](#), [Four](#), [Five](#)

## Similar Events

Photo

**Event Name**  
Date  
Time

Photo

**Event Name**  
Date  
Time

Photo

**Event Name**  
Date  
Time

# WRITING STYLE

The *FSU* brand personality strives to be empowering, limitless, responsive, hardworking, genuine, and welcoming. The writing style on the website should reflect these traits. It should be warm and helpful while also being action- and goal-oriented. Language should be clear, concise, and as simple as possible to lessen deterrents for users. The more academically complicated language is or the more copious details users are required to sift through the more likely they are to get lost or give up.

Users tend to scan pages quickly to determine if they contain relevant information. Only after locating what they are looking for are they likely to read in more detail. However, even then, they are unlikely to dedicate time to read word-for-word an entire page. Clearly labeled headings and sections along with short sentences, short paragraphs, and bulleted lists help users hone in on what they need quickly. For this, they will thank you and be more likely to develop a positive attitude about the site and the brand.

Considering *FSU* serves a large first-generation student population, the site's writing should be focused first and foremost on being an approachable guide for students and families in this user group. This means plain language, purposeful effort to explain or define things like acronyms or university-specific language, and a reading level of no higher than high school. Anything written to speak to someone with limited to no previous relationship to higher education will still serve those who have knowledge or guidance in this area. The reverse, though, is not true. The writing of the website should make the college process and experience accessible for all who are interested.

Writing on the site should also never stand in the way of taking action. Rather it should supplement and enhance the experience for those who wish to consume it. Some users will want to get straight to the point and take a desired action while others may want or need more details before feeling comfortable or compelled enough to do so. Getting users on the path they desire as soon as possible should be considered in how writing is structured. For example, more universal, high-level information should lead on pages or in sections while less important details should be placed further down.

## Writing Examples

The following examples consist of writing pulled from the current FSU website. The bad examples represent writing not aligned with the proposed style while good examples show instances in which the university is already employing this style.

### Bad Examples

- *"Fairmont State Psychology classes consist of philosophical, biological, and social frameworks of human behaviors and their clinical and organizational applications. Psychology majors graduate with an in depth understanding of mental functions and behaviors."*

This language is far too academic to be understood by someone without a background in psychology, and certainly is not a good choice for the first paragraph on a page introducing users to a potential undergraduate major.

- *"University Terrace is a luxurious facility divided into three buildings, facing North, West, and East. The complex features direct tunnel access to the practice field and walkways to the Feaster Center."*

As the opening paragraph on a residence hall page, this doesn't offer the high-level information most users would be interested in, such as room or suite setups. It also mentions proximity to campus locations, which would mean nothing on their own to users unfamiliar with the campus.

- *"This is a place where faculty and staff care that you find a career to sustain your life and feed your soul. You are: hardworking, fiercely individual, practical, compassionate and interested in putting your stamp on the world. You want: faculty mentors who will become partners in your journey to develop your skills and find deeply satisfying work. You need: research opportunities, internships, study trips and service learning experiences to put on your resume. You demand: a great result. So join our mailing list and we'll send information tailored especially for you."*

While welcoming in tone, this writing, as the only writing on the undergraduate admissions page, lacks focus on what users are most likely interested in – the admissions process. Its sentence structure with the repetitive colons is also awkward to scan and read. Overall it's unnecessary for users and a potential hurdle for taking action and achieving goals.

### Good Examples

- *"The Psychology program is ideal for students who plan to go on to graduate school or for those hoping to enter the workforce with an undergraduate degree. Career opportunities include:*
  - *Research Psychologist*
  - *Clinical Psychologist (including Forensic Psychologist)*
  - *Industrial/Organizational Psychologist*
  - *School Psychologist"*

This section of writing from a program page uses clear language and concisely outlines the career path someone majoring in psychology could take, including a bulleted list of jobs.

- *"Opened to students in 2004, Bryant Place is a modern residence hall with suite-style facilities. Residents of this building will find the community of the more traditional residence halls coupled with a more individual living space. Featuring both single and double residence suites, Bryant Place offers flexible living situations for students. Each suite is shared by four roommates, with a central common area and private bathroom facilities shared between them."*

This description of a residence hall straight away helps users understand the room and suite offerings in this building as well as the lifestyle it can offer. Users can quickly scan this information and decide if this is the kind of housing they are looking for and whether they should spend time exploring the rest of the content on the page. Language could be simplified or clarified a bit more, such as what a traditional residence is defined as, but overall it does well.

- *"Want to join the Falcon Family? If you wish to enroll in an upcoming semester, your first step is to complete an application for admission to Fairmont State University. Whether you are transferring or looking to enroll straight from high school, there is no application fee – it is always free to apply!"*

This section of writing from the application page is friendly, helpful, and straightforward. Right away it explains the first step a user needs to take to attend. It also quickly adds the beneficial fact that it's free to apply which users may not have been looking for, but which certainly could help encourage them to apply more. Overall, the tone and focus of this writing make applying to FSU feel simple and accessible.

# KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

The following key performance indicators (KPIs) were chosen to track the performance of website content as it relates to the 3 targeted business goals outlined in this report.

- **Number of site interactions between admissions and users**

An increase in requests for information, questions, or sign-ups for email or admissions events that come through the site could be an indication the site content is piquing users' interests enough to take action and proceed further down the path of applying. Tracking further how many of these users successfully submit an application for admission and what percentage of applicants this is, could help determine how much site content is directly supporting the goal of increasing applications. Periodic measurements of these metrics could help identify when content needs adjusting or when in the admission cycle certain content is most important.

- **Click-through rate for admitted students communications**

The more users who click on a link the more likely the content offered was relevant. Further insight can be gained by looking at the time they spend on a landing page, bounce rate, and the average number of pages they visited after hitting a page. The more time spent on the site, in theory, the more a user is learning about *FSU* and deepening their interest in it. Where data is available, compare who clicked with what students enrolled to see if there is a correlation and if content is supporting the goal of increasing enrollment.

- **Top reasons students leave *FSU* and traffic to pages with related content**

Many interconnected factors contribute to why students leave. However, certain problems, like the inability to access academic and student resources, are problems website content can assist with. Interview a certain percentage of students who leave or transfer each semester to find trends. Then identify what site pages could most help with these problems and track traffic to them. If traffic is low this could mean this content needs to be communicated to the community more or if the bounce rate is high content might need adjusted.



# NEXT STEPS

In order to successfully apply the strategy presented in this report to the entirety of the new *FSU* website, a number of decisions and actions will need to be addressed first. Guidelines will also need to be created so that everyone involved with content is on the same page and working more seamlessly and efficiently toward the same goal of supporting the content strategy.

It's important to understand content as ever-evolving instead of static. It should not be made, put on a site, and forgotten about. Rather it should be thought of as a living thing that in order to do well and help support goals must be tended to. The content lifecycle consists of a continuous cycle of 5 phases:

- **Strategize:** This is what this report does. It explains what content is needed, for who, for what reasons, and how it will be designed, organized, and seen on the site. As a strategy is executed, metrics may show the need for adjustments.
- **Plan:** This is where these next steps come in. Planning for content creation requires defining roles and responsibilities for individuals involved with content and the process they will follow. More about this will be explained later in this section.
- **Create:** To produce content, individuals will need appropriate tools in order to create, approve, and publish it. The university will need to decide on, budget for, and acquire these tools as part of the content strategy implementation.
- **Maintain:** Content needs to be reviewed for accuracy and relevancy at regularly planned intervals, or at least once a year. This will need to be planned for in terms of time and priorities as part of selected individuals' workloads. Some content will inevitably require editing or replacement.
- **Audit:** In relation to tracking the success of the content strategy, content will need to be reviewed according to the KPIs outlined in this report as well as other metrics. As with maintenance, this will also require resource allocation. Audit findings will help to inform whether the strategy is working or needs adjusting.

In order to successfully execute a content strategy, content standards should also be maintained. This means not allowing just anyone to publish any content they want. **People need to be empowered to say no** if something does not align with strategy, even to leadership. There are 2 kinds of content authority that need to be created in order to protect a content strategy: strategic and implementation.

Strategic authority should be given to the person overall responsible for the success of the content strategy and is the kind that should apply to everyone who might pitch a content idea, including those in power. Implementation strategy, though, can live with multiple people tasked with the day-to-day work of content. They should be able to decide what everyday requests are on- or off-strategy and explain to the requesters why. If content authority is overridden then it's likely a content strategy will fail.

The following are the tasks *FSU* will need to complete in order to implement the content strategy proposed in this report.

## Content Management Model

A content management model prescribes the structure in which content will be produced and published. *FSU* will need to choose a content management model that will be capable of supporting the execution of this content strategy using the resources available. The 3 styles of content management model include:

- **Centralized:** All production and publishing is managed by a single department or team, such as a marketing or communications team. This can mean allocating people full-time specifically just for web content.
- **Decentralized:** Production and publishing are split up among a number of teams. This means different areas of the university would be responsible for their own content, such as the School of Nursing taking care of their webpages. This model can be more resource-efficient but can also make it difficult to maintain consistency in content across the site.
- **Hybrid:** This model splits the difference between the previous 2. For example, various departments may be responsible for creating and building content, but a central department may hold editing and publishing power in order to maintain consistency and quality.

## Roles and Responsibilities

In order to successfully create content certain roles and responsibilities must be assigned. These are not job titles, though. Each role represents responsibilities that you should assign for content creation. It is possible for one person to hold multiple roles in the creation process or different people to play the same role on different projects depending on skills and resource availability. The roles that the university must identify the correct individuals for are:

- **Editor:** A person who is responsible for ensuring content is on-brand and on-strategy. There can be more than one editor and their responsibilities can include assigning content creation, reviewing content, communication strategy, and sourcing tools and other resources if necessary.
- **Owner:** A person who is responsible for ensuring content is correct and up-to-date. Content owners are likely to be decentralized in a business and exist in various areas. Responsibilities include finding content and subject matter experts, reviewing content for their specific area, and being a resource for questions during the content creation process.
- **Writer:** A person who is responsible for creating content. Responsibilities include outlining requirements for content, doing research, drafting content, and making requested changes.
- **Subject Matter Expert (SME):** A person who knows about a piece of content's topic. SMEs help by giving information and guidance to content creators and by reviewing content for accuracy.
- **Reviewer:** A person other than SMEs and editors who needs to review a piece of content, such as for legal purposes. Reviewers' responsibilities are the same as SMEs only related specifically to a reviewer's purpose for involvement.
- **Proofreader:** A person who reviews content for grammar, typos, and formatting. These types of changes do not need to be reviewed by others.
- **Publisher:** The person who publishes content live on the site. They are usually responsible for inputting content into a content management system (CMS) and making sure it looks and acts on the page in the desired way before and after it goes live.

## Publishing Process Workflow

To create content *FSU* will need to define a workflow for the process that everyone involved understands and that makes sense for the resources available and the type of content being created. There is no one size fits all answer to this need.

Defining a workflow requires breaking down the content creation process into the individual and required tasks, then creating a logical sequence for these tasks. Workflows should include what role is responsible for each task, any other roles that might need to be consulted for a task, and why each task is important for the process. It's important that a workflow makes sense to those involved and that it's not over-engineered or so cumbersome it becomes a problem for content creation.

Everyone involved should know what tasks must be done before their task and whom they pass the project on to next. The workflow should also inform them about how long each task should take and what tools or resources should be used to complete a task. A shareable document with a diagram or written steps of the process, or both, should be created to communicate it to all involved.

## Content Inventory

Before adding any content to the new site or creating new content, the current *FSU* site's content must be evaluated to determine what can be repurposed as is, what can't and needs to be completely built from scratch, and what needs to be edited in some way. This evaluation should be done according to the content strategy in this report and will require a significant amount of time. It will need the attention of someone full-time for a designated period or need to be divided amongst a group of people. Pages will also need to be reviewed by subject matter experts to ensure their content is up-to-date and correct.

A shareable and editable document will need to be created in order to track the progress of the inventory and specific information about individual pieces of content and their statuses. If the tracking process developed for the content inventory is successful then it's possible to repurpose it for the content creation process later.

## Style Guide

Writing style was addressed earlier in this report in terms of voice, tone, and recommendations for writing for the web. This will need to be developed into a shareable, easy-to-understand document in order to give everyone involved in creating content for the *FSU* site guidance for their work. A specific style guide, such as AP Style, will need to be chosen in order to give writers and proofers a standard reference point to follow. Writing examples should also be included in the guide in order to help explain what is good practice and what is bad practice.

A website style guide should not, though, be created and followed in such a rigid way as to make content unappealing to users and unable to support the strategy. Rather the point of a style guide should be to create consistency in voice and grammatical choices to improve the site's experience for users.

## Editorial Plan

The content strategy in this report can help to inform what content to create in order to support goals. In order to know how and when that content will be published, *FSU* will need to develop an editorial plan. This should consist of a calendar outlining when to publish certain content. An editorial calendar can help content creators plan and prepare for their projects better and also provides reasoning for saying no when someone pitches a last-minute idea that can't be accommodated or isn't on-strategy.

Different sources, such as marketing, are likely to offer guidance on the timing of content publishing. The editorial calendar should be able to bring all content projects together into a clear, scheduled plan that helps content creation run smoothly and makes sure the right content is ready and published at the right time.

## Reference

Further information about next steps and content strategy overall can be found in:

Casey, M. (2015). *The content strategy toolkit: Methods, guidelines, and templates for getting content right*. San Francisco, CA: Pearson Education.